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148

THE

BRIDE OF OBEYDA;

And other Tales.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

MONTVILLE, OR THE DARK HEIR OF THE CASTLE.

VOL. I.



London:

PRINTED FOR A. K. NEWMAN AND CO.

1827.

227



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841



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CHAPTER I.

THE Diana, a large trading vessel from London to Buenos Ayres, left the latter port, homeward bound, early in the month of May 1810. She was fitted up for the accommodation of passengers, and carried with her as such, Mr. Amherst and family, consisting of his wife, his niece, and several domestics.

Mr. Amherst was a rich London merchant, who had come out to South Ame-

rica, in consequence of the death of an acting correspondent there; his absence from home was calculated at about two years, and unwilling to deprive himself for so long a period of the company of a wife whom he loved, and a niece whom he had adopted, he arranged matters so as to make them the companions of his voyage. He had no family of his own; but being, with his wife, fond of children, they had mutually agreed to adopt the youngest daughter of a favourite brother of his, who had a numerous family.

At the age of six years, the little Isabella was taken from her paternal home, and consigned to the care of her uncle and aunt. She grew in their hearts like a child of their own, and was the promised heiress of their wealth. Eight years had elapsed since they had assumed

ed the parental care of their niece, and she was beginning to shew the approach of lovely womanhood, when the summons of Mr. Amherst to South America, led her, a young traveller, across the deep waves of the Atlantic.

Her parents saw her depart with reluctance; but as they knew the affection of those she accompanied, and the attendance of an able governess, they were relieved of all fears on her account, but the perils which might befall her on the treacherous ocean. No dangers, however, assailed the voyagers; and in due time they arrived in America, where all went well with them, except losing Isabella's governess, who died as they were on the eve of returning to England.

The absence of Mr. Amherst did not

much exceed the computed two years; and with prosperous fortune, and undiminished health, he and his family embarked again, to return to the beloved shores of Britain. A fair wind wafted them from Buenos Ayres, and for three successive days the weather continued favourable to their destination; but upon the fourth the sky assumed a dark and threatening aspect, and a deep haze lowered to the extent of the horizon. At some distance they descried a man-of-war, which hailed them; and finding they were for England, sent a boat on board of her, with dispatches from the captain. The boat of the man-of-war had not quite neared upon the Diana, when a violent squall came on, and her oars, with some difficulty, broke through the heavy sea in which she was struggling.

gling. When it reached the ship, it was absolutely necessary for the men to remain some hours, in expectation that the gale would abate; but instead of calming, it continued to increase, until it rose to a perfect hurricane. The man-of-war's men were anxious to depart, but the boldest amongst them hesitated to venture their boat against so high a sea as now raged around.

The evening advanced darker and more tempestuous still, and the man-of-war, hurried on by the storm, soon after bore out of sight of the Diana. Her men, whom she had left behind, looked with sad disappointment after their gallant vessel, and then turned to assist in the safety and management of the one in which their lives were now at stake. A fearful night gathered round her; the

wind roared with redoubled fury, and dashed against her labouring sides, waves that broke over her like black and yawning caverns; her sails were torn into viewless shreds; and at last, with one tremendous crash, her huge masts fell reeling into the furious deep. Her crew looked on in utter despair—labour now was of no avail—the ship refused all guidance, and heaved upon the foaming billows, as their wild and boiling surges lashed her. Hope left the devoted bark; the wind was driving headlong towards land, and the wreck, drifting in the storm, hurried to her final goal.

A night of long and horrible apprehension was the forerunner to the short struggle of blighted life. Daylight broke through the dark tempest, and dimly

dimly displayed the bleak and rocky coast ahead. It was but a momentary glance; the next, the hapless vessel struck upon a reef of rocks, and parting in the instant, her shattered fragments were swallowed up in the devouring waves.

The entire wreck happened near the shore; and one of the man-of-war's men found himself, as awakening from a stupor, lying on the beach, he knew not how. As he sat up to look about him, he perceived two other wretches, who, like himself, had escaped, half drowned; all else was solitary, as if more of life had never been there. He joined the two sailors, who, he found, had belonged to the Diana, and with them vainly looked round for sign of shelter or habitation. At a distance appeared wood,

but within their present reach were only a bare coast, and rugged rocks, all bleak and desolate. Of the vessel there was not a plank remaining, but several of the bodies once contained in her were washing up and down upon the beach, as the roaring waves came on and retired. All they could reach, the sailors drew up, but it was only lifeless corpses; and with sad and desponding steps they strayed along the shore, anxiously searching for any provisions that might have floated. Turning a jutting rock, they found the body of a female, extended on the sand, and on raising her, perceived that some signs of life were discernible. Somerton, the man-of-war's man, busied himself in recovering her, while the others eagerly grasped at some biscuits, which the waves were bringing ashore.

The

The woman recovered to be lost in despair. She darted round a wild glance, then shrieked aloud—" Are they all gone?"

Somerton attempted to console her, but the poor fellow knew not where to find it himself; and as he looked upon the bare waste through which they must wander, without guide or food, he inwardly said—" *We* may get through—but what's to come of the poor girl? d—n my eyes if I know!"

That forlorn girl was Isabella Amherst; she remembered the awful situation of the devoted vessel—the agonized terror of her aunt—the pale, blanched cheek of her uncle, as with quivering lip and upraised eye, he called upon the only Being that could hear them to save; then the tremendous crash—the creaking

of the riving boards — the wild but instantaneous shriek of the drowning wretches. No more did Isabella remember, until she found her head lying on Somerton's wet knee, and his cold hands chaffing her still colder ones.

"Poor girl!" said Somerton, as she looked round her, pale, terrified, and exhausted; "poor girl, this is a sad place for you! but if God help you, I will do all I can to assist you."

"Who are you?" asked Isabella, feebly raising herself off his knee. "I do not know you."

"You mustn't mind that here," said the sailor; "however, if you like to know, I am Jack Somerton, of the Adrastus ship of war; and a d—d unlucky dog I am! But if you will take my own word for it, my girl, I am

an

an honest fellow, and will do you no harm."

Isabella raised her languid eyes to the friendly consoler; a young and sunburned face was bending over her, with an open brow, and a candid eye, that seemed to hold communion with the kinder sympathies of nature.

He lifted his drooping companion up, and desired her to ascend the beach a little, where it was drier.

Isabella endeavoured to comply, but cold, shivering, and stunned, her feet refused their wonted office; and Somerton carried her to a creviced rock, in which he placed her for some shelter.

"Where is the ship?" asked she, casting a trembling eager look on the wide blank sea. "Where is the ship?—Where are they all?"

"Why,

"Why, my girl, you must make the best of your fate," said Somerton; "the ship has gone to the bottom, and all her crew, except you and me, and yonder two sailors. Come, come, whimpering is of no avail; pluck up your heart, and make the most of God's mercy. You see this is a savage coast, without a sign of habitation in view; so we must set about finding some track to pilot ourselves out of this infernal place; and if you cry and tremble thus, you will lose all strength to scramble along with us."

"What—what is to become of me?" exclaimed Isabella, frantickly clasping her hands together. "What is to become of me?—alone here, and no one to care for me!"

"D—n me, if Jack Somerton does not care for you, as long as he can mind himself!"

himself!" said the kind-hearted sailor. "I picked you up, and I'll never be the lubber to leave you without convoy in your distress. I'll stick by you to the last, my girl—d—n me if I don't! But this whimpering will never do! All are gone to the bottom; and if those roaring billows cannot bring them up again, do you think that your tears will? Try to walk about a little—it will drive the chill off; and I will go and get some biscuits for you."

Frightened and agonized as Isabella was, she saw all the necessity she was under of following Somerton's advice; and as she slowly dragged her trembling limbs along, she looked in despair at the ocean, where her relatives were so lately buried, and then at the wild desolate country which she had to traverse, with

with men whose existence even she had been ignorant of, until within the last few awful moments of her life—her sole dependence on the rough and generous sailor, whose untaught sympathy had already drawn Isabella to seek a protector and a friend in him.

CHAPTER II.

THE stormy tide was now retreating from the beach; a few biscuits, and some other light and useless articles, were all that its waves had carried ashore; and when Somerton descended from the rocks, he found the other two sailors busily engaged in stripping the dead bodies of their comrades, in search of whatever valuables might be about them. This sight gave Somerton no cheering idea of his companions; but he joined them, without making any remark on their employment, and consulted on what was the best plan to be pursued,

pursued, to extricate themselves from their present distress.

It was decided by all that they had now only to hasten to leave the coast, and travel towards the woods, where they appeared thinnest, as if intersected by the hand of man.

The two sailors showed symptoms of discontent at the company of Isabella, and grumbled at the burthen which she would be on their otherwise too fatiguing journey.

"Why, in the name of Heaven, would you leave the girl behind?" demanded Somerton, indignantly. "Is that your gratitude to God for saving you from this d—d wreck? Hark ye, my lads, if he do not repent of his mercy, it will be because we have this girl along with us; and while I have an arm to hold

hold her up, she shall never drop behind!"

Neither of the sailors replied, but stuffing into their pockets the few trifles of value which they had found in those of the drowned, they all returned to the place where Isabella was. She shrunk back as they approached, and with a timid glance of supplication, sought the honest eye of Somerton.

"Cheer up," said he, in a friendly voice, and advancing to her—"We have a gloomy cloud over us, to be sure, but a fair wind may blow us right yet, and into some snug harbour, ere long. Come, eat a bit, poor girl!"

"No, I cannot taste it," replied Isabella, putting aside the biscuit, and recoiling from the rude looks of the other two sailors.

"It

"It may be a dainty bit though, by to-morrow," said one of them—"as dainty a bit as yourself."

Isabella involuntarily caught Somerton's arm; he drew her close to his side, and they left the scene of the wreck, and of their wonderful preservation.

The tempest had by this time considerably subsided—the rain was entirely over—and the gale that yet blew strong, helped to dry the drenched garments of the unfortunate travellers.

For three hours they pursued their way, and hope gave them spirit to persevere in it, as they came upon what bore the faint, yet evident marks of a human track.

Isabella, terrified to be left behind, would not complain of fatigue, and constantly denied being weary to the inquiries

quiries of her kind and attentive guide, Somerton, until at last he felt her absolutely sinking from his arm; and as he stopped to support her, she exclaimed, with a look of the most beseeching despair—"I can go on—oh do not leave me!"

"No, no; don't fret about that," replied Somerton, quickly; "I have taken you in tow, and will bear you safe into port, unless I founder myself. Hollo there, my lads! the girl is tired. Let us stick by one another in our peril."

The other two men were a little ahead, but they returned on being called, and all sitting down together, the biscuits were again produced.

Isabella now no longer refused a share; but she was thirsty, and mentioned it.

Somerton jumped up immediately, and

and said he would search if there were a spring or a rivulet near.

"I will go too," cried Isabella, starting from the grass at the same time, dreading to be left with the other two sailors, and feeling herself every moment becoming more dependent upon Somerton.

One of the men passed a coarse jest upon her preference of Somerton, and the other followed it up more rudely still.

"Avast there!" said Somerton, in a loud, indignant tone, his eyes flashing fire as he spoke—"avast there, you lubbers! is this a time for your rascally gibes, with death but this moment from your heels? Let the young woman alone, I say—she is safe in my company; but

but I'll be d——d if I think she would be so in either of yours!"

The two sailors gave a careless, blackguard laugh, but Somerton's manner awed them into more sober language; while one of them cried—"As for me, a duck in the brine was never meant for my harm. This is the third wreck I have made, and I spun about on the yawning planks like a top. However, here am I, safe and sound: let the devil take the rest, if he likes."

Isabella turned, with a sick shuddering, from the wretch, and would have again flown to the protecting arm of Somerton, but that she feared to renew the unfeeling jokes of the sailors. She stood paler than ever, and felt that the moment she had awoke from the ship-

wreck

wreck was not to be, as she then imagined, the most cruel period of her life.

"Sit down and rest yourself," said Somerton, in the kindest tone that ever human voice spoke in—"sit down, my poor girl; we'll get water for you as we go along; I cannot descry the slightest appearance of any from this."

Isabella had need to rest her trembling limbs, and in drooping silence she again sat down on the grass, while Somerton placed himself by her side.

After an hour's rest, they recommenced their weary journey. Somerton offered Isabella his arm, and as she took it, a deep and painful blush crimsoned her languid face. Her companion noticed it for a moment, then hastily turned away his head in silence.

Somerton had promised true; a little further

further on, they came to a tolerably wide rivulet, which crossed their path. They all bent down to the welcome brook, and eagerly allayed their thirst, laving also in its stream their brows, which were parched by the sun and wind, their heads being uncovered to the weather. Isabella felt the first mouthful of water she tasted strengthen her exhausted frame, and as her body became invigorated, her spirits revived too; the dying weariness which had before assailed her departed, despondency gave place to hope, and despair to gratitude to that Being who had so miraculously preserved her life, and now seemed to assist nature itself to overcome the difficulties and fatigue which she would have once thought it impossible that she

could endure, and not die at their first trial.

They again set forward, with renovated vigour, from the blessed and grateful stream. Its restoring influence appeared also to have smoothed into better manners the rough minds of the two sailors. The cheerful disposition of Somerton broke forth in part from its former depression of misfortune, and Isabella, as she hung confidingly on his arm, began to recover, in part, of her horror of her other two companions.

This happier strain of feeling continued while daylight lasted; but though they only took one other rest, they found themselves, at the fall of eve, still in solitude, and out of sight of all habitation of man. They had, however, got into the woods, and as there was no rain,

rain, and the moon shining very bright, their situation, considering the disasters which had befallen them, was not so very uncomfortable—at least, so the men thought; but to Isabella it appeared worse than the death from which she had escaped, to pass the long night in the company of the two sailors.

Luckily one of them had a tinder-box, and striking a light, they made a fire with several large boughs which they broke off from the trees. It burned dimly, owing to the damp state of the wood; but in their circumstances, even the dull blaze was cheerful and consoling.

On some of the branches they found a large nut, which, upon being opened, presented a kernel that tasted palatably enough to the hungry travellers, and

formed a humble variety from the hard sea-biscuit which was their only other fare.

"Do now go to sleep," said Somerton to Isabella; "this is weary times for a girl like you. There is some moss at the bottom of that tree, and I will cover you with my jacket."

"I am not sleepy," replied she, in a voice struggling with terror and fatigue; "I will sit here," and she crept closer to Somerton's side.

No entreaty could prevail on her to lie down; she resolved not to shut an eye; but her youthful frame could not hold out as she wished it, and, unknown to herself, she dropped into a profound slumber. While she was in this unconscious state, the two sailors made a proposal to Somerton, which left him in no doubt

doubt of what ruffians he had to deal with. He started to his feet in the instant, and brandishing his hanger, which, as a man-of-war's man, he had stuck in his belt, swore that he would stab to the heart the first man that approached her.

Although he was but one against two, yet his hanger gave him the advantage, as the others were unarmed. However, much altercation ensued, and language that Somerton disdained to answer, except by standing more directly over Isabella, and keeping his cutlass, with a firm and threatening hand, pointed at his brutal associates.

The vehement tones of the men, and their furious oaths, awakened Isabella from her sleep. The conversation she could distinguish informed her at once

of the danger with which she was threatened, and the faithful protector that Somerton had proved himself to be; yet, ignorant of the advantage which he possessed, her frantic fears saw the others overpowering him, and, with a shriek that made the woods ring, she attempted to fly from the spot.

The two sailors made a spring after her; but Somerton, being nearest, caught her in a strong grasp, saying—"Stop! while I have life I will defend you—do not stir from me."

Isabella sunk on her knees beside him, and with clasped hands, and upraised eyes, gazed on him in pallid anguish, as if his aid was to be something more than mortal.

The sailors put now no curb to their tongues; but Somerton, aware of the fate

fate that would befall his helpless companion, should he lose the advantage which he then held, wisely restrained his wrath, which burned to knock the scoundrels down, and contented himself with standing before Isabella, his eye and his cutlass pointed steadfastly at the ruffians, who, like true cowards, durst only venture to attack what they deemed defenceless.

The remaining hours of the night passed by in more dreadful horror and apprehension to Isabella, than even the awful wreck of the preceding one had done, and she dared, in her agony, to accuse the merciful Providence which had spared her from death, to be the victim of brutal outrage, forgetting, in her alarm, the hand which it had raised up to succour and to save her.

The two sailors, wearied at last of their scurrility, threw themselves along the grass to sleep; and when all was quiet, Somerton entreated Isabella to lie down to rest again, solemnly assuring her that he would watch by her, and guard her, with his life's blood, from all insult or danger.

Isabella shuddered at the very name of sleep, and again throwing herself on her knees, she embraced those of Somerton, and in accents broken with agitation, named him to God as her deliverer and only friend.

The situation was new to Somerton; although he had often taken the part of the helpless before, yet this was the first time he had ever met a woman to defend and protect. His rough, toil-worn hand trembled beneath the tears which the

the grateful Isabella shed upon it, and his heart beat with warmer tenderness to her every succeeding moment, yet without a feeling that did not make her more and more sacred to his honest and generous soul.

As the morning greyly dawned, the two sailors started from their sleep. Somerton's eye was awake, and fixed upon them, stern and sharp, and his naked cutlass sparkled in the rising light. Isabella nearly died at the diabolical looks which they bestowed in silent malice upon her guardian and her. They talked in a low voice apart; and while Somerton keenly watched them, and Isabella's blood ran cold at the conference, the sailors suddenly turned round, and snatching up the tinder-box, and as ma-

ny biscuits as they could grasp at, rushed from the place, and were soon hid in the woods from sight.

CHAP-

CHAPTER III.

"D——D unfeeling scoundrels!" exclaimed Somerton, as his angry eye followed their flight.

"Whither are they gone?" demanded Isabella, anxiously.

"To hell, I hope," replied Somerton, bitterly; "however, they are away from us—left us to live or starve alone."

"They are gone then!" cried Isabella, in the wildest accents of joy; "will they never return? oh! it would be better far to starve alone than to live with them!"

Somerton sent a tremendous oath after

them, and deeply regretted the tinder-box and the biscuits.

"I will carry nuts in my lap," said Isabella, in a deprecating voice, a little frightened at Somerton's wrath.

"You, poor soul!" said Somerton, kindly; "why, my girl, you seem hardly able to carry yourself. Damn the lubbers! they have only given Davy the slip, not the scape. I thought we might have carried you amongst us to-day. How do you find your tackle—in sailing trim?"

Isabella looked at him, in ignorance how to answer.

"Can you walk?" said Somerton, smiling.

"Oh yes, I can," replied she, eagerly; "I would have died rather than let them carry

carry me. Do you think they will come back?"

"No, I do not," answered Somerton. "They seemed half-inclined to abscond from the first; and I take it they are fellows who will not be in the company of an honest man, if they can help it."

"Now then I am happy!" cried Isabella, in an ecstacy of joy; "I no more fear any thing!"

"Not while Jack Somerton is by you," said he, with animated energy, and gratified look; "it is a worthless arm that will not rise to defend the unprotected. They're not sailors, b——t my eyes if they are! they're gaol birds, going straight to the gallows, else they had gone down yesterday in the tempest."

Somerton picked up three biscuits that

that were left, and stuffed his pockets with nuts, while Isabella insisted upon carrying some in her lap; and again they set out in search of the habitation of man.

Considering Somerton in the light of her guardian angel, Isabella soon lost all shyness towards him; and as they advanced on their way, they mutually became to each other like friends of a whole life's standing. So many frightful events had crowded upon the mind of Isabella within the short space of her shipwreck, that the deplorable fate of her uncle and aunt had lost the first poignancy of affliction, and appeared to her memory more like the past event of months than one single day. Necessity gave a strength to her limbs, and a vigour to her exertions, that before she had never dreamed

of

of possessing; and in thanks to God, and gratitude to Somerton, with the ardency of youthful hope again reviving, she cheerfully pursued her path, supported by the kind arm of her companion, whose company seemed to make every coming mile pass lighter to her than the last.

The track they were following bore more and more the appearance of a human path as they advanced, and at last formed into a sort of road through the woods, which at one part of the way became so thick, that Isabella could not help exclaiming, with a blanching cheek of fear, that the sailors might be lurking there, to spring out upon them unawares.

"Never fear till you see me down," said Somerton, cheerfully.

"Then I would not live, I assure you,"

you," said Isabella, with earnest simplicity, and looking at him with eyes that swam in tears.

"You would regret poor Jack then?" said Somerton, with quick energy, as he gazed, with a fervency that made them fall, on the sweet eyes so artlessly turned upon him. Then, after a short pause, he hesitatingly added—"What is your lot in the world, my pretty lass? When you get back to your friends, will there be a birth amongst them for a sailor like me?"

"Oh, yes," replied Isabella, warmly; "you will ever be welcome amongst them!"

"Then you are not a lady?" said Somerton, in well-pleased accents; "else you would turn your back upon poor Jack when you got amongst great folks. What

What brought you all the way to America?"

A feeling, which Isabella knew not then to be pride, made her shrink from a disclosure of her real rank in life, under her present distressing circumstances. She was far from all her friends—a wanderer in the wilds of America—dependent on the protection of a common sailor—destitute of the necessaries of life—and to be an object of public charity, should they ever reach a shelter from their present houseless and unfortunate state. A blush rose to her cheek, and for the first time in her life a falsehood stained her ingenuous lips, as she replied—"I came out in attendance upon Mrs. Amherst."

"Poor girl!" said Somerton, sympathizingly; "see what it is to be poor, when

when one so young as you was forced out to service across this wide ocean! Well, no matter," added he, in a more cheerful voice, and drawing her closer to his side; "kind hearts, thank God, are equal to poor as to rich. You wont forget Jack Somerton, will you, when you get home?"

"No, I never will," answered Isabella.

"Nor I you, my sweet lass," returned Somerton, with fervour. "Well, I did think the wreck an infernal thing when it first happened, and cursed my self heartily for an unlucky dog; but, after all, folks never know what is best for them—I might have sailed the world over in the Adrastus, and never met a girl like you."

"And if you had," said Isabella, bursting

bursting into a flood of agitated tears—"oh, if you had, what would have become of me?"

"God knows, my girl—not much good, I dare say," replied Somerton, feelingly: "but come, don't cry for what hasn't happened; we'll tow together into safe harbour yet."

They walked on without any interruption, or appearance of the two sailors; and beside a clear brook, that ran along part of their way, they sat down to rest themselves, and to eat some of their nuts and biscuits. The day was very fine, and the high trees shaded them, in part, from the bright rays of the sun.

Isabella thought she had never tasted such a feast, and Somerton, as he laved up the clear cool stream, said—"Three days ago, I should have thought this but a sorry

a sorry draught, now it comes the sweetest that ever wet my lips. What name shall I drink to you by, my girl, when I wish you a speedy end to your present troubles, and a fair voyage after through life?"

"Isabella they call me," replied she.

"Isabella," said Somerton; "that is a long name—I will shorten it a bit.—Here's t'ye, my pretty Bella; and may every heart you meet wish you as well as does Jack Somerton's. It is no bad wish."

The kindness of this rough unknown sailor was engraving itself deep in the young heart of Isabella, and the confiding innocence of her manner, so expressive in every look and word, of her utter reliance on his faith, thrilled with rapture through the honest heart of Somerton,

merton, and told him, in the pleasure that he felt, that the upright man, even in his most adverse moment, has a consolation of which the changes of this world never can deprive him.

The spirits of Isabella had wonderfully supported her; but at last her strength began to yield to the great fatigue she had undergone; and Somerton insisting now, in good earnest, on carrying her, caught her up in his arms, and bore her along.

He had carried her a tolerable distance, when she perceived him become pale, and the next moment he made a full pause, and suddenly let her down.

"What is it—oh, what is the matter?" almost shrieked Isabella, her own colour fading also.

"Nothing, nothing!" answered Somerton,

merton, resting himself against a tree; "I think my left arm must have got a bruise amongst the rocks yesterday—that is all."

"All!" repeated Isabella, in wild alarm; "all! It is broken!—you are ill, and will die here, alone from help!"

"Die!" echoed Somerton, exerting himself to laugh; "no, my pretty Bella, I shall see you into safe port yet—so don't be alarmed about being left without convoy."

"Oh, I was not thinking of myself!" cried she, weeping.

"What, all of me?" said Somerton, quickly, the colour mantling redder again to his face. "By Heaven, you have healed my arm!—but, for God's sake, do not weep more! I never could stand a tear, even on an indifferent cheek,

cheek, and when I see them on yours, they fall like sharp shot into my heart. My sweet lass, let me wipe them off for you!" and as he spoke he bent forward, as if to catch her in his arms.

Isabella started back, with a half-exclamation of alarm; her eyes for a moment gazed on him with reproachful dismay, then hiding her crimsoning face in her hands, she burst into a flood of tears.

It had been an impulse beyond control with Somerton; in the next instant he recovered himself, and as deep a blush as Isabella's started in self-indignation across his cheek. For a minute he stood in accusing silence; then, in a low beseeching voice, said—"My pretty Bella, I meant no harm; it was but an honest kiss from an honest heart. Come,

my

my lass, give me your hand in peace, and take mine, that Jack Somerton will be a brother to you, while we remain in distress."

The tone he spoke in was flattering and humble; and when Isabella raised her tearful eyelids, she saw that Somerton's were cast to the ground, in regret and self-accusation.

There is something in honesty that speaks for ever to be believed. Isabella pardoned Somerton, without a doubt remaining behind. She put her hand into his, and with a sweet and agitated voice, said, as she did it—" My brother and my friend, Somerton."

Somerton pressed the confiding hand to his beating breast, and colouring crimson again, he held down his head, unable to speak.

It was some little time before the self-possession of either was recalled from the interruption which this incident had occasioned it; but as neither reverted in the slightest degree to the offence, it began, in the companionship of suffering, to lose its restraining recollection, and ere long it seemed to vanish altogether from the memories of both, and friendship and confidence wore away all reserve as before.

It was, however, with slower and wearier steps, that the two wanderers now pursued their way; night was again beginning to darken down the sky, and they were still in the solitude of the desert. Somerton knew not what ravenous animals might infest the woods, and they no longer possessed the means of kindling a fire to scare them away. He

forbore to alarm his companion with those fears; and seeking out a spot of softer moss, for her to repose on, he bade her sleep in peace and confidence.

"I do, Somerton," said Isabella, gratefully; and, worn out with fatigue, she laid herself down, and scarcely pillowed her head on the turf, when she fell into a deep slumber.

Somerton took off his jacket, and softly folded it across her unsheltered head, then stretching himself at a short distance from her, he, like his companion, resigned himself defenceless into the hands of Providence. The arm that had shielded them amongst the devouring waves, spread also its buckler over them in the desert.

Strengthened and refreshed, Isabella awoke with the clear sunbeams of the morning,

morning, and casting her eyes anxiously around, perceived Somerton soundly sleeping beneath another tree. She discovered the sheltering care which he had taken of her the preceding night, at the expence of his own comfort; and, coarse and soiled as the jacket was, she bestowed upon it that kiss which she had refused to its wearer; then rising from the ground, she lightly approached Somerton, and folding the jacket over his thinly-clad breast, knelt down beside him, and offered up her guileless prayers to Heaven, soliciting from it ten thousand blessings upon Somerton.

As she still knelt, Somerton awoke, and the deep blue eyes of Isabella, bent in tender thanksgiving over him, was the

first light that his awakening glance received.

"My life, you are safe!" was the first rapturous exclamation of Somerton, as he started to a recumbent posture. "Did you do this?" and he looked at the jacket that fell off his breast as he moved.

"What did you do last night?" said Isabella, with soft reproach. "Had I known how cold you had left yourself, I could not have slept."

"Neither could I, had I thought my pretty Bella's head was exposed to the damp dews," said Somerton, who had hastily checked the impassioned warmth of his first salutation, and now anxiously inquired if she had rested well, and felt refreshed.

Isabella cheerfully answered in the affirma-

affirmative, and endeavoured to laugh away Somerton's vexation, that he had no longer any thing to offer to her but a few nuts.

Necessity, however, made them a welcome repast, and as there were plenty of them to be found on the trees all along, literal hunger, at the least, was not a portion of their calamity.

The light of the sun showed them more distinctly where they were, than the last night's moon had done, and the almost beaten track they were pursuing; nor had they gone far, when Somerton perceived the recent cuts of an axe on one of the trees. This appearance was a joyful sight, and told, almost beyond a doubt, that they were now fast approaching to the dwelling of man.

At last the blessed sounds of human

neighbourhood greeted their anxious and delighted ears; and in a few minutes after they came down upon a village, which the woods, being on a height, hid until almost close upon it.

CHAPTER IV.

As they approached, several of the inhabitants came out to gaze at the forlorn strangers, and in the first group they recognized the two sailors, who had reached the village the preceding evening; but true to their ruffian character, had forborne to mention, or excite sympathy for their deserted fellow-sufferers.

Some of the women were advancing towards Isabella, when the two sailors spoke apart to them, and then seemed to enter into an explanation to the villagers that gathered round them in a knot.

Immediately upon the whisper, the women shrunk back, and their looks of pity changed at once to glances of contempt and shrugs of scorn, as they turned unanimously away from the trembling and astonished Isabella.

The inhabitants of the village were a mixture of Indians and Europeans, the latter seemingly little more civilized than the former: Somerton, supporting, almost carrying, his drooping companion, boldly advanced amongst them, and asked if they had no charity to bestow on shipwrecked strangers; and if the women had no compassion to show for one of their own sex, who was near dead with fatigue and hunger.

They still hung back, and the men looked sneeringly on, while Somerton, boiling with indignation at their unfeeling

feeling conduct, loudly and roundly sent them all, soul and body, man, woman, and child, to the lowest pit of the lowest regions, until Isabella, overcome with fatigue and terror, dropped fainting from his arm. This seemed to have some effect on the women; one or two of the eldest came forward, and assisted to recover the unfortunate wanderer.

Somerton, in an agony of alarm, bent over her, when, just as she was opening her eyes to returning life, Somerton heard himself addressed in excellent and native English. The sounds electrified his heart; new hopes sprung to his eyes, as quickly raising them, he asked—"Will you too refuse assistance to the stranger?"

"God forbid!" replied the other. "I heard of the treatment you were re-

 ceiving,

ceiving, and hastened hither, to take you to my hut. I am a missionary here, and it would ill become my function to refuse assistance to the destitute, whatever their character may be."

"That is spoken like a Christian," said Somerton; "though, for my part, I cannot see how a poor shipwrecked devil is to get his character written out for him in this outlandish place. However, bear a hand, will ye, to stow away this poor girl into some kind harbour, and take me in tow likewise; and if we can't reward you, why, d'ye see, there's One aloft that will, that's all."

"That reward will be ample recompence to me," returned the missionary. "Follow me, with your young companion."

Somerton lifted Isabella in his arms, and,

and, bestowing another hearty volley of oaths on the bystanders, repaired to the hospitable hut of this true son of religion.

The missionary called in an old Indian woman to assist Isabella, and then hastened to set the contents of his humble cupboard before the half-famished wanderers. But before Isabella could taste of the grateful store, she mentioned Somerton's bruised arm, and entreated them to get some relief to it.

The eyes of Somerton warmly thanked Isabella for her remembrance of him; but he declared that the hurt was not worth minding. At her repeated request, however, he showed his arm to the Indian, who was held in great repute as a doctress by the villagers, and the solemn shake of her head, as she

looked at it, made Isabella start from her seat, and anxiously approach them. —"Oh, what an arm!" cried she, despairingly.

"Only a passing mark," my sweet lass, said Somerton, gaily. "So now that the damage is ascertained to be a scratch, let us fall to, for my teeth long to try what eating is again." And while they seated themselves at the missionary's board, the Indian woman departed to gather herbs, to make a poultice for the sorely-bruised arm of the generous sailor.

After it had been applied, and Isabella had retired, to rest her wearied limbs once more upon a bed, the missionary informed Somerton, that the inhospitable reception they had received from the villagers was owing to some

scandalous

scandalous account which the two sailors had given of the conduct of Isabella and him in the desert.

The missionary scarcely required the indignant refutation of his astonished guest to disbelieve the malicious tale. There was such honesty in Somerton's countenance, and something so pure and artless in Isabella's, that the eye but required to see them, to convince the heart that all was good where they were.

The wrath of Somerton arose to fury at the diabolical falsity of the two sailors; it required entreaty little short of force to prevent him from sallying out in search of them, to bestow on them the desert of their villany.

The missionary implored him to recollect the weak state of his arm, which would unfit him at present from matching

ing one man, besides two; that worsted he would certainly be, perhaps even to death, by such scoundrels; and, deprived of his protection, what was to become of the poor girl, exposed, without defence, to their abandoned dispositions.

Somerton softened, as the missionary spoke of the deserted fate of Isabella without him, and with a deep sigh he answered—"True, Mr. Parson, my arm is not altogether for myself just now. It was God's mercy that they did not know how disabled I was in the woods."

"You have experienced much of his mercy of late," replied the missionary: "your escape from a shipwreck so dreadful as that which you describe yours to have been, was a miracle in the power of God alone. I mourn for the

the timeless fate of those who were so suddenly swept into the awful gulf of eternity; I adore the mercy that saved two so worthy of preservation, as you and your young companion seem to be; and I humbly hope that the inscrutable decrees of Providence have rescued those two sinful men from present death, to afford them yet a time to repent of their evil courses."

"If I had been brought up to preach, Mr. Parson," replied Somerton, "I should perhaps answer you in lingo like your own; but I am only a poor sailor, rough and rude as the waves I plough. That the girl was worth saving, is a fact as true as your own Bible, Mr. Parson; but as for me, d'ye see, I am no better than my neighbours; and unless it be to comfort my old father a bit,

who

who has no other chick than myself, I might have gone down, as many a better fellow has done before."

"But not an honester fellow, I am sure," said the missionary, with feeling. "And although I have known you only for a few hours, yet I will venture to say, that the man is happy who calls you his son."

"Why, I don't think my old dad would say I was a plague to him," replied Somerton, in a tone of kind recollection; "but as for making him happy, Mr. Parson, I have no power of that. 'A light heart and a thin pair of breeches,' as the song says, are all the store of poor Jack."

"No, my good fellow," said the missionary, impressively, "you have a store in your heart, that the wealth of the world

world could not equal. Long, and for ever, be it your portion! it will make your days cheerful, and your nights soothing and tranquil."

"Amen, Mr. Parson!" answered Somerton; "that is a desirable lot, any how; and though you rig me out finer than my colours, yet here's t'ye, in your own stuff; and if I had any thing better to offer you than hearty thanks, you should have it, that's all."

"The blessing of an honest man promises all the reward I covet," replied the missionary.

"You have it, Mr. Parson. If the blessing of a poor sailor can do you good, you have the best one of Jack Somerton; not so much, d'ye see, Mr. Parson, for myself, for I have learned to rough life, fair or foul, but your kind-

ness

ness to the girl is worth more than I have, or ever shall have, to bestow."

The missionary grasped the hand of Somerton, across the table, and with deep emotion said—"Take mine, in return, generous sailor. Blessed be you on earth! and blessed you surely will be in heaven!"

Somerton learned from the missionary that the village of their shelter was named Obeyda, a place of considerable resort for European traders, several of whom were there at that time: it was far south of Buenos Ayres, the journey almost impracticable to pedestrian travellers unacquainted with the way, but that caravans were to start early the ensuing week for the latter place.

Isabella heard this intelligence in a transport of joy; then, the following minute,

minute, burst into a flood of tears, for which she could not attribute any reason, but listened in sobbing silence to the anxious solicitude of Somerton, and the kind soothing of her benevolent host.

It is true she heard with joy that she was so soon to be on the way of returning to her friends; but scarcely had that burst of rapture escaped her, when she recollected that in being restored to her own rank in life, she must for ever bid adieu to the kind but lowly Somerton; and the idea of parting from him was the hidden cause of the heavy tears that now bedewed her cheek.

Somerton seemed to have become a part of her existence; in vain the missionary assured her that she had nothing more to apprehend from the two sailors;

she

she knew that they were in the village, and when Somerton was absent from her sight, a thousand agonizing fears for his safety filled her gentle and anxious mind.

At sixteen, one so little versed in the world as was Isabella, knows not all the sentiments which then begin to assail the awakening heart.

She thought it was gratitude she felt, yet a blush would constantly mantle to her cheek at the speaking glance of Somerton's eye, and sighs she wondered at would palpitate her young heart, when she recollected her home, her rank, and her parents.

Somerton had no depressing thoughts to mingle with his partiality for Isabella; he soon discovered that he had given his heart wholly to his sweet companion,

nion, and, untroubled with the bashfulness of a woman, or any idea of disparity of rank, anticipated with delight the time when, absolved from his self-devoted pledge of brotherly attention, he should restore her to the comforts of friends and security, and then ask his pretty Bella to swing for life in his hammock.

Luckily for Somerton, in this period of need, he was master of some dollars. It was not the mandate of duty that had brought him to share the shipwreck; he had volunteered to go on board the Diana, expecting to find an uncle of his, who sailed mate of that vessel, and with whom he meant to send home to his father the few savings of his pay.

The mate of the Diana had, however, died,

died, a short time previous to her leaving Buenos Ayres; and all the reward which Somerton had for his filial attention, was to get himself shipwrecked, and nearly drowned.

It was a little treasure now, and he poured it, to the last piece, into the lap of Isabella, not an hour after their arrival at the village, begging her to spend it all, and regretting that it was not more.

Isabella, in the hopes of one day restoring it to Somerton tenfold, accepted part of his little store, and procured for herself a bonnet of rude materials, and a wrap to replace the gown, which hung round her almost in tatters.

Somerton could scarcely be prevailed on to recruit his own dress out of his dollars, but earnestly insisted that

Isabella

Isabella should spend them all, until the missionary came to assist her refusal, and represented to the generous tar, that on their coming journey they would find a little money the only means of procuring for themselves any comfort.

"Mr. Parson, your advice tells at once that we are in the world again," said Somerton; "whilst we traversed the desert, the dollars were trash. I'll not swear before you, Mr. Parson, but Adam and Eve must have had a fine life of it."

Isabella seldom stirred from beyond the door of the missionary's hut, and Somerton's entreaties that she should do so were faintly offered and never pressed.

The few days of Isabella's rest had almost restored to her that beauty which the

the shipwreck and following distress had helped to fade. If she was attractive, even in that time of despair and languor, she was lovely beyond description now; and Somerton, while he gazed on her enraptured, shrunk from her being seen, more charming than ever, by the two sailors, who remained in the village also for the caravans, and were often perceived wandering idly around the missionary's hut.

Somerton's arm was still too weak to allow him to encounter the ruffians with any chance of success to himself, or perhaps Isabella was the cause of his newly-acquired caution, for a shudder and chill of every nerve came over him, when he thought of her exposed to their unhallowed power.

To the missionary Somerton often expressed

expressed his smothered and burning indignation, that the baseness of those two scoundrels was still unrevenged; and as often did his charitable host gently lecture him on forbearance, and beseech him to remember that revenge was a feeling the true Christian should never know.

The missionary preached in vain. Somerton swore he would lick them, until he made their infernal tongues tremble in their heads, the first moment that his arm recovered strength—"For, Mr. Parson," added he, "I did not come to clew the sails with a puny hold, and I'll be d——d if the hand that is lifted up in an honest cause will not make the heads of two rascals strike under to it."

CHAPTER V.

At last the day of the departure of the caravans arrived, and Somerton and Isabella bade a last adieu to the hospitable hut of the missionary. He accompanied them to the place of rendezvous, where a number of people were assembled, and amongst them the two sailors, who had begged sufficient to assist them on their way.

Isabella trembled at their sight, and clung closer to the arm of Somerton, which she felt as her only earthly hold.

They were approaching to ascend, when one or two women, who were to be

be travellers also, exclaimed against the entrance of Isabella, and declared that she should not proceed in their company.

The eyes of Somerton flashed fire amongst them, as he indignantly demanded what they meant; and again he advanced to place his terrified companion in the vehicle.

The women more loudly still opposed her entrance; and in their jargon, Isabella, in horror, understood, what Somerton and the missionary had hitherto kept from her knowledge, the vile falsehoods which the sailors had circulated concerning her.

She shrieked, and hiding her face, would have sunk to the ground, but for the missionary; while Somerton, in angry altercation with the women and

drivers, insisted that the latter should force the admission of Isabella into the caravan.

They however hung back from complying; the women were the wives of traders, who chiefly supported the expences of the caravan, and the drivers hesitated to offend customers so lucrative.

The missionary in vain endeavoured to adjust the unpleasant business; the women, incited by the worthless sailors, who stood sneering maliciously by, and low and vulgar, and half savages themselves, persisted in their refusal of receiving Isabella amongst them; whilst their husbands, smoking carelessly their segars, joined with their wives, though not in such virulent language, and called to the drivers to hasten their departure.

Somerton had not time to attack the two sailors; the caravans seemed in the instant of setting out. He turned to the missionary, and with confounded look, and faltering voice, implored him to entreat the travellers to take them along with them.

"Go, go!" cried Isabella, half suffocated, and still hiding her face—"go you, Somerton, and leave me to die!"

"If I do, they may damn me in the other world, as they will those inhuman brutes!" replied Somerton, firmly. "I say, you lubber of a driver, when shall you be back here again?"

The answer was—"Not for three months—perhaps six."

Somerton looked aghast at the missionary, who was again fruitlessly employed in attempting to soften the wo-

men, and convince them of the falsity of their prejudice against Isabella. His charitable expostulations failed to procure admission for her, unless she were really the wife of Somerton; and perceiving that they seemed determined to be resolute in their unfeeling folly, the missionary turned to his unfortunate friends, and said—"It is needless to attempt to move them further. I grieve indeed that the land should be even more cruel to you than the sea, and that fellow-beings should shew themselves so destitute of mercy and compassion to the desolate stranger. Decide yourselves, my young friends, on how you are to act; you must be prompt, for all appear impatient to be off."

"Those wretches are of the devil's own brood, and going straight back to their

their dam!" said Somerton, with a tremendous oath, directed amongst them; "they have no hearts, therefore it is needless to try their cursed jaw longer; so, my pretty Bella, rather than to be left behind in this outlandish place, what do you say to taking honest Jack Somerton in tow, and getting this worthy soul to splice us in the instant? I have no gold to give you, my lass, but a faithful heart and a kind hand——"

The cracking of the drivers' whips, and the motion of the wheels, interrupted the blunt courtship of Somerton.

"Stop! for God's sake do not leave us!" called he, loudly after the travellers; then turning again to Isabella, who stood the literal image of despair, he hastily exclaimed—"My sweet lass, say quick—will you take me, and trust to my

word that I will do all I can to make you happy?" He had taken her hand as he spoke; and now with an anxious and beseeching glance, he looked in her bloodless face for an answer.

Something of parents and rank gleamed across the distracted mind of Isabella; but the horrors of her desolate situation was uppermost, and made all other ideas yield to the agony of its own. She met the eye of Somerton—it was full of honest and tender truth, and her heart, even at that dreadful moment, felt a faint thrill of rapture that it was directed to her. All other recollections than the present faded from her terrified mind, and soft and low, scarcely heard, she murmured—"I will go with you, Somerton."

"Stop, stop, I beseech you!" cried the missionary,

missionary, to the loitering caravans, "and take this man and his wife along with you."

The drivers, who had reluctantly joined in refusing Isabella admittance, willingly halted at the call; and the missionary, who knew not that the rank of Somerton and Isabella differed so widely, and who had remarked the mutual though undisclosed attachment which they bore to each other, hesitated not to join the hands of a young pair, whom nature and fate seemed to have designed should be united. Before the caravans, and surrounded by a group of spectators, the most of whom were savages, did Isabella then become the wife of Somerton.

The missionary, in pencil marks, hastily certified the marriage, and affix-

ed to it the address of his home when in London. Somerton took the paper: Isabella saw not, nor heard not; her feeling of life seemed almost extinct; and unconscious of the parting benediction of the missionary, or the first and fond kiss that Somerton pressed upon her pallid lips, she was lifted into the caravan, and left for ever the savage village of Obeyda, hallowed only by the good and benevolent missionary.

It was only the women and luggage that occupied the caravans; the men rode, consequently Isabella was separated from the presence of Somerton; and when a returning consciousness restored recollection, she looked wildly and vainly round, for the eye where dwelt her sole dependence and protection.

Her companions expressed no concern for

for her weeping and lonely situation; but still regarded her askaunt, as if uncertain yet that they were not contaminated by the fair timid creature, who sobbed so sadly beside them.

While thus unheeded and unsympathised with, Isabella's thoughts took an almost maddening range, and placed in torturing array before her mind what she had done, and what she was become. Her parents on both sides were highly connected, and though that distinction made them neither vain nor arrogant, yet a dignity, suitable to their station, pervaded their ideas and their manners; and strong sentiments of that proper pride, which despises none, yet firmly retains its native hold in rank, were inculcated with the earliest principles of their children's education.

"I may die, but return home no more," cried Isabella, in an agony of internal emotion. "The wife of a common sailor!—Oh, my father!—my mother! you will not thank the ocean that spared me!"

Thoughts of the same nature arose with still deeper agitation to her mind, until she became almost frantic at the lot which a cruel fate had decreed to her, and shrunk with horror from the women beside her, in the idea that she was now fallen to their level. Bitterly—bitterly did she accuse herself for allowing any emergency, however urgent, to force her into an union so derogatory to her rank. The wife of a common sailor! reduced to be the fitting associate for the lowest menial in her father's house! The thought grated through her breast to distraction,

distraction, and that pride which she had early been taught, yet exempt till now from feeling, arose to struggle with the attachment which her young heart had first experienced.

The halting of the caravans put a stop for a time to this silent and agonizing communing with herself. Somerton was again before her, and his kind eye, and still kinder voice, half banished the bitter commotion that was injuring his cause in the bosom of his new-made bride.—"My sweet Bella, I am weary from you!" said he, as he threw his fond arm round her, and pressed another kiss on her averted lips. "Are they kind to you?"

"They have not spoken to me," replied Isabella, blushing at being still retained in his embrace.

"B——t

"B——t them!" returned Somerton, with all his heart, "they are a parcel of infernal jades! but never mind, my lass; you could not understand their cursed jaw if they did!"

Isabella turned her head aside, and tears, she could not restrain, gushed in torrents down her flushing cheeks.

"What, crying, my girl!" said Somerton, as he gently forced round her face to him. "Why, if you wish to break my heart, you will weep! What is there I can do for you? Jack Somerton will serve you till the last of his life."

"I only weep at the severity of our distress," replied Isabella, faintly.

"Distress!" echoed Somerton; "damn me if I would not be shipwrecked once a week to be spliced to my pretty Bella! Cheer

Cheer up, my lass—we'll swing snugly in our hammock yet."

Love and pride contended in the agitated bosom of Isabella; her heart would have thrown her into the honest arms of Somerton, but her mind, too late awakened, revolted from a husband so lowly and obscure.

At night, the caravans halted in the desert plain, and tents were pitched for the accommodation of the travellers; but as only two were the number, the men and the women were separated, and each sex occupied one exclusively.

Somerton's open brow began to contract at this arrangement, and in something of a sullen tone, he said—"This is a damned queer separation of man and wife! There will surely be a corner for me beside my pretty Bella!"

The

affection and regret kept her long awake, vainly wishing that Somerton and she had been born to the same lot of rank.

The journey of the caravans being chiefly through desert plains or miserable villages, in which they only stopped a few minutes during the day, Somerton had still to bid his young bride adieu at night, when he would have given the world, had he possessed it, to have laid his head on the pillow beside Isabella.

Owing to an accident happening to one of the wheels, the caravans were a day later of reaching their destination, than they had reckoned on at starting, and to suit the traders, who were anxious to gain the end of their journey by a certain time, they travelled through the

the last night without resting at all, and arrived at Buenos Ayres late in the afternoon of the following day.

The inn at which they put up was poor, and frequented only by the lower order. To stop there during the distress attendant on her shipwreck, Isabella would scarcely have complained of, after what she had already suffered; but to be there as the place now suitable to her station—to mingle with people whose manners were even more frightful to her than were the solitudes of the desert—to push through them, and to be pushed again, as if she had never thought nor moved beyond the level of their sphere—Isabella felt she could not retain reason, if life, to sink so low. Her eyes grew dim to the honest, animated countenance of Somerton—her ear closed

to



sunk, more dead than alive, on a bench near the door, while Somerton, eyeing indignantly those that surrounded them, angrily exclaimed—"B——t me, if this is not as bad as Obeyda! Is there no heart here either that bestirs itself for a poor fatigued girl?"

None moved, nor took any notice of his address, further than by a careless stare, except a servant girl, who approached Isabella, and in good-natured accents, asked if she wanted anything.

"Why, yes, to be sure she does, my girl!" said Somerton. "Don't you see she is as tired as woman can be? Get her something to eat and drink, and be quick, d'ye see."

The servant brought her some thin wine, and a bit of bread, and told Somerton, that if he wished for any refreshment,

freshment, he could go into the next room, where the drivers of the caravans and the other men who had come along with them were eating.

Somerton refused to leave Isabella, but she begged, and at last implored him so earnestly to go, that he reluctantly consented, and as he went, gave her a dollar, the half of his store, bidding her spend it as she liked; adding—"This good soul of a girl will sit by you till I return, or get for you whatever you want. I shant be ten minutes away from you, my sweet lass, and brighten up a little, if you can, those pale cheeks of yours. The world has been damned hard to you of late, but never mind its rubs, my lass—a faithful heart will bear through them all—and here's another pledge to you of Jack Somerton's:"

Somerton's:" so saying, he caught her fondly in his arms, and gave her a warm and hearty kiss.

He left her with a kind and cheerful smile, and Isabella's eyes almost started from their sockets, with the earnest gaze with which she viewed his departing steps.

An impulse beyond control had seized her—she was as yet but nominally the wife of Somerton—to-morrow she might be indisputably so—these then were the few hours left her, in which she could ever hope to escape the low and ignoble lot to which a cruel destiny seemed to have decreed her. Pride, yet in anguish, ruled the moment—as one in frenzy she stopped not to reflect, but dispatching the servant girl on some distant errand, she rushed from the

the kitchen in her absence, and proceeding hastily along the streets, advanced to a gay and splendid mansion: she knocked loudly at the door, but when admitted into the hall, she uttered not a word, but with a shriek of despair sunk senseless on the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

THE house to which Isabella had fled belonged to an eminent banker, with whom her late uncle had been on terms of close business and friendship.

The alarm of the servants, at an intrusion so singular, collected immediately the different members of the household to the hall, and the fair lifeless form extended there was soon recognised to be that Isabella Amherst, whose death had been so recently deplored in the fatal wreck of the Diana. She was instantly carried to bed; and she who, not five minutes before, had stood in poverty

ty and unattended to, had now wealth, to luxury, surrounding her, and attendance beyond her utmost need.

Isabella recovered to perfect consciousness, and starting half up, she looked wildly and anxiously around. Somerton's honest glance no longer met her eye, and with a cry of despairing regret, she again sunk nearly lifeless on the pillow.

Mrs. Barry, her hostess, imagining that her senses were not entirely sound, hastily dispatched a messenger for a physician, and in the interval of his coming, endeavoured, by restoratives and soothing, to calm the anguish of Isabella, who, unmindful of the friends that surrounded her, continued to weep in a grief that bordered on distraction. By the time however of the physician's arrival, her emotion had worn itself into a sub-

dued calm; and he was able to assure Mrs. Barry, that all she laboured under was fatigue and excitement of mind, which latter most probably arose from finding herself once more amongst friends, her soiled and humble dress proving that she had suffered much distress.

Mrs. Barry was glad to believe the cheering opinion of the physician; and shortly after she found it confirmed, for Isabella, restored by a little sleep, which fatigue and agitation had thrown her into, was able to give some slight account of the fatal shipwreck which had befallen her, and a confused account of her subsequent disasters.

The room was darkened, and Isabella hid her head from all light, save that of her accusing conscience, as she endeavoured,

voured, in trembling accents, to relate to Mrs. Barry, that she had been saved from the shipwreck, along with three sailors, with whom she had wandered on to an Indian village, where some carravans passing, had, through charity, taken them on to Buenos Ayres; and when Mrs. Barry, in the interest of friendship, wished to question her more particularly on her strange escape and adventures, and on the names of her companions in misfortune, Isabella, in an agony of dismayed apprehension, wished to assure her that she was too much the prey of fear and sorrow to give remarking attention to what was passing around her, or to think of the names of those, who, like herself, had every thought occupied with the miserable situation in which they were placed:

but the oppression of falsehood was a weight that her candid mind could not bear up against; and faltering out a few unconnected words, she burst into wild tears, and hid her face deeper in the pillow.

She could with truth say, that she knew not the names of two of the sailors who had escaped along with her, and that she was as ignorant of the appellation of the owners of the caravans, or the inn at which they had put up; but was Somerton's name unknown to her? —that name, which in honest faith had been pledged so often by its generous owner to protect her—that name, which had been her first teacher of an affection more tender than that which she gave to her parents—and that name—could she forget

forget it—to which her own had now alone any title!

It was in vain they procured for her all the luxuries, and comforts, and cares, to which she had been accustomed—her mind was distracted with the thoughts of Somerton—a thousand times she was tempted to fly to him—to throw herself upon the honest heart which might be now breaking for her loss—to implore him to pardon her ingratitude, and to wander with him over the world. The dollar, nearly his all, which he had given to her at their last parting, she pressed in a killing agony to her heart—it was now useless to her, but as his gift, and while it lay thus needless in her hand, what might not Somerton be suffering, left poor, and friendless, and forsaken! — "And could I leave him, after all he had done

for me!" thought the agonized spirit of Isabella. "Oh, cruel heart! canst thou be blessed more?" An involuntary shriek of anguish burst from her heart at the question; her attendants believed she had awoke from a frightful dream, and flew to reassure her. She started up, and attempted to spring out of bed; then retained by their alarmed hold, she fell back powerless, and overcome with internal anguish.

The deception in which Isabella shrouded her shipwreck, might not have passed so undiscovered, had Mr. Barry been at home during her arrival; but he was up the country at the time; and Mrs. Barry, easy of belief, and unaccustomed to exertion, made no attempts to gain any further knowledge of the shipwreck than what her guest chose to relate;

late; and being of a gentle nature, she soon forbore to ask any more questions on the subject, feeling unwilling to witness the agitation into which a renewal of the topic ever threw Isabella. Nor did she express much surprise at the constant sadness and tears of the young wanderer; to lose such friends, and in a manner so appalling too, was cause sufficient to damp the gayest spirits, without inducing any other reasons to be suspected.

Isabella was almost distracted, between the desire of departing immediately for England, and the idea of leaving Somerton behind. Could she but gain any tidings of him, she felt she could repay the knowledge almost with her life! But in vain she wished; that name, so constantly echoing in her heart, was

 unknown,

unknown, as if it had never been, by those with whom she was now surrounded. They were amiable, and often talked of virtue, humanity, and benevolence; she heard those qualities applauded, and just praise given to them who had displayed them, while her ungrateful tongue, though trembling to speak, was silent on a theme on which it could have lavished volumes: she shrunk from joining in the gracious conversation, and left the generous deeds of Somerton and the missionary to the undying recollection of herself and them, and the registering of God alone.

It is needless to dwell longer on the bitter thoughts that harassed, tortured, the mind of Isabella. Pride conquered the sore struggles of love, and she prepared to quit once more the, to her, fatal,

but

but never-to-be-forgotten shores of America.

Several English vessels were to sail homeward bound, at the time of Isabella's arrival at Buenos Ayres, and on board one of them a passage was taken for her by Mr. Barry's head clerk, who acted in the absence of his master. Eight days, therefore, after her unexpected appearance, saw Isabella take a second leave of the hospitable Mrs. Barry, who reluctantly permitted her young guest to depart before her husband's return.

The feverish anxiety of Isabella to be gone, had alone extorted her consent. Constantly in tears, and resolute in refusing to admit company, or almost to leave her chamber, Mrs. Barry's sympathizing nature felt for a young creature,

whom she believed panting to be restored to the arms of her parents, after such cruel alarm and distress; and, wrought on by compassion and entreaty, she at last agreed that Isabella should depart under the protection of a family, with whom she was herself intimate, and who were embarking at that period for England.

When the moment of absolute departure arrived, Isabella stood amongst them a statue of despair; they kissed and blessed her; she remarked not their caresses, but, sunk in the anguish of accusing and regretting thought, wished only to die in the land where Somerton still breathed. She passed from them speechless, beyond the power of utterance; and, burying herself in her veil, looked not up until she was told to alight from the

the carriage, to step into the boat that was to convey her on board the vessel.

The family with whom she was to sail had taken her from the house of Mrs. Barry; and with them strangers, yet attentive, Isabella again trusted herself to that ocean which had already been to her so sad and eventful. As they were rowing up to the vessel, another boat passed them, and stopped at the same ship. Some conversation ensuing between the two crews, and the latter being ready in assisting up the luggage of the other, Mr. Elford, the gentleman of the family to whom Isabella was delivered in charge, inquired, as he thanked the civil tars, to what ship they belonged.

They answered to the Adrastus, which lay at anchor down the river, and that they

they had brought letters on board from their captain, who was then ashore.

An utter palpitation shook the whole frame of Isabella, as she heard the reply of the sailors.—The Adrastus! Great God, what a name to her recollection! Somerton so near his companions, and she not to tell that their generous comrade was left friendless and deserted on the shore! The agony of her ingratitude became too acute for her to support: with an hysterical shriek, she clasped her hands to heaven, when sinking instantaneously, she dropped lifeless on the deck.

The boat of the Adrastus was gone before she revived, and Isabella, drowned in heart-rending tears, fancied she had but to prepare for death. The singular coincidence of the Adrastus's boat coming

coming a second time, and with the same errand, on board the ship in which she was, struck her as an omen of a similar ill fortune to that which had befallen her on its last arrival; and in dismayed apprehension she listened to the sounding gale, expecting each minute when the hurricane would arise, that was to sweep her to that fate from which she durst no more hope or ask for mercy.

The ocean, however, sought not longer to molest her, but smooth and tranquil, glided her across its deep path, and yielded her safe, in all but heart and conscience, to the land of her birth and her home.

Mr. Elford, who proceeded with her to London, waited on her parents, and cautiously disclosed to them the tidings of Isabella's safety and arrival. The recovery

recovery of this lamented lost treasure from the deep, almost destroyed for a time the intellects of her whole family. Her mother sunk into fits of delirious joy; nor had she perfectly recovered, when the astonished and transported father, who had flown in search of her, in the moment Mr. Elford spoke, returned with this dear wanderer, and gave her, who had been wept as dead, back, living, to the clasping arms of her mother.

Fancy may imagine the innumerable questions that were asked her of her sad adventures; as she had already done to Mrs. Barry, Isabella denied possessing sufficient composure of mind at the time to be able to notice in detail all that had befallen her. Floods of tears deluged her pale cheeks, as she attempted this recital

recital to her listening parents, and sighs that broke every word, swelled from her lacerated heart, and almost impeded utterance. A thousand inconsistencies were remarked in her relation; but, undreaming of the reality that had so strangely happened, her parents, and those around, placed them entirely to the alarm and confusion that must have seized so young a mind, under such frightful and distressing circumstances. She however was saved to them; and as the subject could only cause renewed lamentations for those who were really gone, it was soon dropped entirely; and a bustle commenced to store a new wardrobe for Isabella, and to procure for her masters to finish those studies which had already been so long and so ably pursued.

Life had much of its outward gifts to bestow upon Isabella; rest and proper care quickly banished the drooping figure and pallid looks with which she had returned; and when she did appear renovated from suffering, she displayed beauty so rare and charming, that it was wondered at by all beholders. Nor was this uncommon loveliness her only portion; by her uncle's will, made previously to his departure for America, she was left sole heiress to his fortune, which was already ascertained to amount to sixty thousand pounds; and it promised fair to add much more to that sum, when affairs should be finally wound up.

CHAPTER VII.

ISABELLA had but one sister, the eldest of the family, who had been for several years respectably settled in life as the wife of sir William Langfield. She was an affectionate relative, and a good, though proud woman; and now Isabella's wealth and beauty made her an ambitious one too. She longed to present this young and lovely sister to a world, which, in every sense, she was so calculated to adorn, and anxiously waited for the time when she thought Isabella had only to appear, to gain a coronet for her fair brow.

Lady

Lady Langfield had not these thoughts alone: Mr. and Mrs. Amherst also indulged in aggrandizing hopes for Isabella, and considered her as one who was born to be the head, as she was the ornament, of her family.

On the return of Isabella, and for some little time after, the depression on her spirits did not excite much surprise in her parents, remembering what she had lost and undergone; but now that months had elapsed, and all that affection could do was lavished upon her, her continued sadness and averseness to the gaieties so natural to form the delight of a girl at her age, became to them a matter of serious consideration, and damped considerably that joy which had so totally possessed them on her restoration.

Lady

Lady Langfield, equally anxious about this pensiveness in Isabella, assured her parents that it was unnecessary to confine her longer to home parties, and persuaded them to hasten the period of her introduction into what is called in high life, the world, in the hopes that company and variety would dissipate the melancholy which appeared so inconsistent with the youth and fortune of Isabella, and the gay spirits that before her departure for America had made her the emblem of innocent and light-hearted mirth.

Isabella pleaded against this friendly advice of lady Langfield; she was aware of the cause which had produced it, and attempted to smother from her manners the secret grief that was preying upon her spirits, and turning the blessings of the

the present into a load of intolerable anguish. The remembrance of Somerton was with her by night and by day: pride had now in all probability parted them for ever: she had left him whose life, and heart, and best services, had been devoted to her—left him, deserted and friendless, without one cause for such inhumanity, but that he was lowly and obscure—frowned on by destiny, but rewarded for the slight by nature's best and kindest gifts. Now that she was separated from him, and he thrown on the wide world to seek his hard fortunes, she might never know where, pride no longer supported her against the influence of his idea; it recurred incessantly to her thoughts, with all the generous attractions which had won her young heart in the desert—and now to think

think of him, to regret him, to deplore her ingratitude, was all of life that she desired to share.

She turned sickening from her wealth; the enjoyment of it was poisoned by the reflection, that Somerton might be begging or toiling for his bread, while all comfort and splendour were hers, denying to him, who ought to possess it wholly, the smallest pittance of those riches which his care alone had enabled her to return to enjoy. She durst not seek sympathy from any mortal; even the echo of her sighs she was fearful to hear, lest it should proclaim the deep secret that corroded her happiness. She could adduce no sufficient cause to combat the wish of lady Langfield, and the sad and unexplained tears that accompanied her earnest petition to be allowed

to

to remain in seclusion, only stimulated her sister, and now her parents, to insist upon her entering into the gay circles of company.

Lady Langfield opened the way to her appearance, by a grand ball and supper, attended by the first fashionables of the metropolis; and for Isabella's partner, selected the young lord Blaydon, whom both her ladyship and sir William secretly hoped might be Isabella's alliance.

His lordship was good looking, and good humoured, and by his family of a noble race, and splendidly connected. His estates were moderate for his rank; but being unincumbered, he was probably a richer man than many of his embarrassed neighbours, whose lands were thrice the extent of his.

He

He thanked lady Langfield, in animated terms, for the introduction to her sister, and seemed, by his admiration, and subsequent attention, to bid fair to become the lover that her ladyship wished him to be, of Isabella.

Rich and beautiful, and of respectable connexions, Isabella no sooner appeared in society, than invitations innumerable solicited her acceptance; and an adulation of attendance was offered to her charms by the young men who surrounded her, and bowed enraptured to her loveliness, as to her wealth.

Lady Langfield was gay herself, and resolved also to conquer what she fancied to be a disposition to melancholy in her sister; she therefore launched into the fashionable round of amusements and visiting; and with the appro-

bation of her parents, was constantly accompanied by Isabella, who formed now a general magnet of admiration and courtship.

Numberless proposals were made to Mr. Amherst for her hand. At the first mention of marriage, Isabella turned ashy pale, and a look of horror sprung to her eyes, that alarmed her father, and made him hastily ask if she were ill?

A faint—"No" reached the lips of Isabella, but scarcely passed them. Marriage proposed to her! Was she not already a wife? Her heart refused to conceal its anguish, and in attempting to combat its feelings, the unhappy girl uttered a piercing scream, and sunk against her chair, in a burst of wild and hysterical tears.

The alarmed exclamation of Mr. Amherst

herst attracted the notice of his wife, who was in an adjoining room: she hastened to inquire the cause, and with shocked surprise, beheld the almost convulsed state of Isabella.

They could not even conjecture the cause of her dismay, which, though when she recovered, she imputed only to the feeling of the moment, they were almost certain had some cause unknown to them; and in bewildered amaze they pondered on what could be the reasons of her depression, which they placed in combination with the emotion she had just now shewn. She had no severe dictatorial father to dread—to refuse or to accept was left wholly in her own power.

"Why, then," said Mr. Amherst to his wife, when they were left alone,

" why did she show such killing agitation, when I uttered the word marriage to her? Can she, so young, have formed any attachment in America? — or was the object of that preference on board the fatal Diana when she went down? Have you, my dear Sophia, been led to entertain any similar doubts? On the bosom of a mother, a daughter frequently reposes a more tender confidence than she will yield to a father."

"No," replied Mrs. Amherst; "I am equally perplexed as yourself, and know not to what cause to impute the painful feelings which she, although unavowed, most certainly carries in her bosom. If it could be any attachment in America, the object of it must have been left behind. I have heard Isabella repeatedly say, that no passengers were on board the

the Diana but her uncle's family. But I own, like you, I have at times thought that her sadness might proceed from some separated attachment; and that idea has, perhaps, led me to be more silent upon her American sojourn than I should otherwise have been. I believe I should die outright to part with her—to go to that dreadful land again. Her youthful heart can scarcely yet have received its deepest impression. By ceasing to revert to where it was first felt, the remembrance may by degrees lose its power, and eventually yield to silence, and to absence."

Under the persuasion of Isabella's grief proceeding from the recollection of some distant attachment, and both parents anxious that it should cease to influence her mind, neither of them

again alluded to the discomposure into which the first proposal of marriage had thrown her, but allowed her to reject her suitors as she chose, until lord Blaydon advanced to offer her his hand and title. Then both parents and sister came forward to interfere in the refusal which she was preparing to send to him, and entreated her to recollect the vast sum of earthly good which she might be sacrificing, in thus inconsiderately rejecting a man of lord Blaydon's agreeable manners and excellent character.

When they spoke of marriage, the senses of Isabella were near forsaking her; she looked round, as if despair were to meet her eyes embodied; and vainly sought to find words to combat the just arguments which her relatives brought forward

forward in his lordship's behalf, and their own desire.

Sound seemed stifled in her bursting bosom; a trembling—"No" was all that her pallid lips could utter; but though that faltering monosyllable was often repeated, accompanied by tears that spoke of agony, her parents would not allow the final negative to be given to lord Blaydon, but insisted, with some displeasure, that she should longer consider how she destroyed her own prospects, and their hopes.

The proposals of lord Blaydon, so strenuously supported by her parents, came as if to overwhelm entirely the peace of Isabella. She could allow that the displeasure of her parents was not without just cause. Lord Blaydon was a man that might have captivated

the most superior of her sex; his appearance, his manners, and his rank, were all that could be desired in a husband. She felt that he was agreeable, and might have excited her love; but there was a remembrance that haunted her for ever; and while lord Blaydon stood beside her in his courtly dress, and attractive manner, in her mind's eye there was a form, which, though only clad in a coarse jacket, faded the brilliancy of lord Blaydon, and made his sparkling glance look dim to the dark one that shone incessantly in her memory, like a star of bright, but painful light.

While thus, more unhappy than ever, Isabella sustained on one side the attentions of lord Blaydon, and on the other the remonstrances of her parents, chance led

led her one day to the Strand, to view, with a party, a collection of paintings, which a foreigner had brought to London for sale.

There were several carriages standing at the door of the exhibition, so that the one in which Isabella was, stopped some yards down, and she and the ladies accompanying her alighted, and walked up the intervening distance.

Isabella, whose beauty was such that it attracted every eye, held down her modest head from the gaze that from all spectators was fixed upon her, and saw not by that means, a man in the dress of a sailor, who was passing by as she stepped from the carriage, but stopped in the instant he beheld her, and eyed her with the most intense astonishment.

His look followed her until she disappeared within the door of the exhibition, when turning to the servants who attended the carriage she had come in, he asked, in a careless sort of manner, who that pretty girl was.

The servants regarded the questioner as if they wondered any thing inclosed in so poor a jacket would dare address folks who wore laced coats, and turned from him, as though they heard him not; but the man was not to be offended so easily; he noticed not their scorn, and began to talk to them in so free and rallying a strain, that he soon brought them over to be good and laughing friends with him, and dexterously gained from them Isabella's name, and place of residence.

That same evening Isabella spent at a splendid

a splendid rout, and on the following morning was told, that a man had called and inquired for her the evening preceding, and seemed much disappointed to find that she was from home.

"A tradesman, I suppose," was her remark.

"No, madam, he appeared like a sailor. I never saw him here before," replied the maid.

Isabella had just presence of mind left sufficient to enable her to retire to her dressing-room, but no sooner had she entered alone, than she sunk nearly powerless into a chair. A wild emotion of apprehension and transport thrilled through each alarmed vein.—"Was it Somerton, who had at last traced her flight, and come to claim his wife!"

The idea was half of life and half

of death to Isabella. He could not forgive her ingratitude, nor would her father forgive the degradation which such a marriage would bring upon his house.

All must now be revealed, and she must sink from her sphere of rank to be the wife of a common sailor! For a moment the thought was agony, but the next, love at length triumphed, and folding her hands, she raised them to Heaven, and with soft ecstacy exclaimed —" Shall I be Somerton's again! Great God! this is mercy I deserved not!"

The ejaculation had barely murmured from her lips, when her waiting-woman entered, to say that the sailor was a second time below, and wished much to see Miss Amherst in private.

Isabella

Isabella was scarcely sensible of life; with trembling steps, and a heart that all but burst her side, she descended the stairs, and hastened to the parlour, into which the stranger had been ushered; she lingered a moment at the door, love, and fear of her reception, almost overcoming her weakened frame, when pushing it open, she entered, to seek forgiveness, and to throw herself into the generous arms of Somerton, for ever.

Tears of rapture and conscious ingratitude filled her eyes to dimness—a figure, in a jacket and trowsers, swam before her sight—she advanced—the man did the same. God! was it annihilation that struck her! So she stood, as if all mortal animation had left her body,

body, gazing, as if in her last look, upon one of the ruffians from whom Somerton had saved her in the desert.

CHAP.

CHAPTER VIII.

She did not shriek, each impulse seemed to freeze at his sight, while he, unmindful of her despair, gazed on for the first minute in silence, his eyes roving over her with looks of the most daring admiration.

His insolent glances recalled Isabella to some recollection; she turned loathingly away, and feebly, and in silence, hastened to leave the room.

"You are not going to leave your old friend so soon," said the sailor, in an assured tone. "Your trim is altered, I think, since we met last. You have parted

parted convoy too." Here he lowered his voice, and, with a diabolical look, whispered—"Where is Jack Somerton?"

Let none imagine they could describe the agony of feeling that Isabella endured at this dreadful interview. The sailor had placed himself between her and the door—she might scream and alarm the house, but what might not this monster say! She had experienced the direful falsehood of his malice before, and alas! even adhering to truth, he had that to discover, which might, absent and unknown of as Somerton was, injure, if not ruin her reputation, and wound the feelings of her family beyond cure.

She was not able to stand, and, as she sunk into a seat, summoned courage to say—

say—" Have you no fears for your audacity? Do you remember that I am in my father's house?"

" Tell me first where is Jack Somerton?" said the sailor, confidently; " a wife's house should be her husband's, but I hear not a word of Jack in this. You gave him a good slip at Buenos Ayres. B——t me! if he had known how you were to serve him, he needed not have fought so stoutly for you! However, I take your kind. You are of the lady breed, and Jack was for your turn only in the hour of distress. You have steered yourself into good harbour, any how," continued the sailor, looking broadly round the room; " you are safe out of the stormy gales, and your pilot is thrown back on the rough wave, to weather it as he can. Jack

was

was my sworn foe, but I could not wish him worse than he has got from you."

"Begone!" cried Isabella, struggling between indignation and fear. "Is your insolence madness, that you dare insult me with your accusations? me, who know you to be the vilest and basest of mankind!"

"Good words, mistress," said the sailor, with a sardonic sneer; "we can both, it seems, talk over the failings of each other. I see you don't care much for my company, but you are an ungrateful jilt, so I don't wonder. My birth has been a hard one, since you parted from us at Buenos Ayres. My comrade and I steered to the West Indies, where the damned fever soon did for poor Ben. I came home three weeks ago, and am now afloat on the world. I'll

I'll warrant you have plenty of the rhino, so as Jack Somerton cannot share it with you, what say you to being generous to Will Oldham? I can keep a secret for a pretty girl as well as any man, and you see my jacket is the worse of the wear."

The design of the ruffian was apparent; he had learned enough of Isabella's history to be aware that her marriage with Somerton was unknown to the world, and by her bearing her maiden name, that she probably wished the circumstance to be for ever hidden from discovery.

He had also heard of her wealth, and built his hopes of being largely bribed to secrecy. With these thoughts he had sought her, and now stood opposite to the fair unfortunate Isabella, as secure that

that she was the victim of his mercenary views.

The unhappy girl sat in speechless wretchedness; she saw the villain's aim, and shuddered in horror at the gulf into which she was precipitated; her eyes were fixed, scarcely conscious of vision, on the ground, and her hands clasped in despair upon her trembling knee.

The sailor stood silent too for a few seconds, when perceiving that Isabella made no attempt to speak, he said—"It don't argufy to chip the matter, mistress; the case is thus, if you wish to conceal your marriage to a poor tar, I am the only man to assist you; but, to tell a plain tale, it won't be for nothing that I will screen a brother sailor's good luck. You have got plenty of the

the rhino, and may well spare a few shiners now and then, to the friend who leaves it still in your power to be taken in tow by some richer galley. So here is my hand, and as you use it, my mouth opens or shuts."

He accompanied the words with the action; Isabella, ready to expire, shrunk from the coarse and filthy hand extended to her; she spoke not, until it approached so close to her, that she sprung, near shrieking, from her chair, and with faltering quickness, exclaimed —"What—what would you have me do?"

She had scarcely uttered the breathless interrogation, when the door opened, and in entered her father.

Isabella irresistibly, almost unknown to herself, threw an instantaneous glance

of

of supplication towards the sailor; he marked it with triumph, yet uncertain of the extent of her communications respecting her shipwreck, could not restrain a slight embarrassment from spreading over his countenance at this to him unwelcome intrusion.

Mr. Amherst advanced, regarding the stranger with looks of inquisitive surprise, and said—"Who is this, Isabella, who, I have heard, has been making such inquiry for you?"

"One of the sailors who escaped from the shipwreck," replied Isabella, so faintly, that she could be heard, and no more.

"One of those who came through the desert with you?" demanded her father.

The sailor took courage—Mr. Amherst's

herst's countenance bore no marks that he knew what the companions of his daughter had been in the desert; and in a humble tone, widely different from the insolent one which he had used in addressing Isabella, he immediately replied—"Yes, your honour, I was cast away with Miss, and two sailors more, and afterwards travelled through the desert with her, and on to Buenos Ayres, where we parted company, and now I am glad to see Miss so comfortable, after all her hardships."

"And I am glad to see you too, my good fellow," said Mr. Amherst, cordially; "as I can understand from Isabella that she would have been ill off, had it not been for the companions whom Providence so graciously sent to her in her distress. If I can be of any service

service to you, you have but to ask, and I will do, to the best extent of my power."

"I thank your honour," answered the sailor, bowing lowly; "to be sure, Miss could never have got through the desert alone, but we thought it no trouble to help a poor woman in distress."

"A true sailor, I see," replied Mr. Amherst, "ever ready to lend a hand to the unfortunate. Where are your other two companions?"

"One of them is dead, your honour, and the other is somewhere on the sea."

Isabella, who had started forward to listen to his answer, sunk back despondingly at this vague reply. Although every vein was bursting with indignation at the daring falsehood of the sailor, yet

yet she had not interrupted him by one monosyllable; and Mr. Amherst offering him five guineas, rang the bell, and desired the butler to see that the sailor was well treated; giving him, at the same time, an invitation to return whenever he wanted a dinner, while he remained out of employment.

Isabella, horrified at the imposition practised on Mr. Amherst, almost died to cry—"Father, turn him from your house—he is a monster!" but the falsehood in which she had involved herself, repressed the agonized exclamation which was hovering on her tongue; and when her father turned to her, and said—"I rejoice to be able to shew my gratitude to one of your kind protectors," she burst into a violent flood of tears, and

threw herself, speechless and half fainting, on his shoulder.

Her grief at present could excite no surprise, so many painful recollections must have arisen to her mind at the sight of the sailor, that in tears only could she have been expected to recognise him. But when left to herself, what dreadful emotion raged within her bosom! in what despair was that hope destroyed, which had led her to imagine that she was once more to be restored to Somerton! by what a demon was her expecting eyes blasted! and now that villain, from whose outrage one arm had alone saved her, was caressed by her father, invited to the house, and rewarded; while her generous defender was unheard of, even by name, and deserted

erted to poverty, by her whom he had so faithfully and so long protected!

"Can I—dare I murmur?" groaned the wretched Isabella; "is not this rending anguish—this enthralment to a ruffian, the just consequences of my own conduct? Without Somerton, what would truth now avail against the falsehoods with which this sailor would load me, were I to expose all to my father! My father! oh! he would never forgive me, nor perhaps believe me; I should be driven from home, and from the world. Oh, Somerton! oh, God! it is just—misery should ever be the reward of falsehood and ingratitude!"

Mrs. Amherst, to whom her husband immediately related the arrival of one of the companions of Isabella's shipwreck, no sooner heard the account, than she has-

tened anxiously to see him, to offer her thanks also, for the supposed succour which he had lent to her then helpless child. His appearance did not prepossess her—it required all a mother's gratitude to induce her to come forward to him in the cordial manner she wished; and when she left him, such an effect had his soiled and shabby apparel upon her, that she directly ordered a bundle of Mr. Amherst's worn linen, and some other articles of dress, to be put up for the sailor to take along with him.

From him she proceeded to Isabella's chamber, and while she fondly endeavoured to sooth the affliction of that poor girl, she inwardly thought, that was the sailor she had just seen an emblem of the other two, her daughter's companionship with them must have been

worse

worse even than the agonies of the immediate shipwreck.

Mr. Amherst had no reason to complain that the sailor was backward in seeking the assistance a grateful father had tendered to him—he was back the third day, and in an interview with Mr. Amherst, told him that he was wearied of the sea, and desirous to gain some land employment. Mr. Amherst in a short time procured him the situation of porter in a mercantile house of his acquaintance; the salary was good, and the sailor, in his frequent visits at Mr. Amherst's, never went away empty handed.

Isabella he never saw from the first day of his entrance there; terrified again to meet the ruffian, she avoided ever stirring out unaccompanied by her pa-

rents, or some one whose presence would awe him from approaching her. She would have given half her life to have desired her father to ask if Somerton had returned to the Adrastus, or in what ship he sailed, for it was evident that the sailor knew something of him after she had left him at Buenos Ayres; but conscious of all that hung upon Somerton's name, and of the questions that would ensue from her father, she durst not venture the interrogation she was so anxious to have explained, but full of torturing alarms and heart-consuming recollections, became a creature that trembled for the events of every coming day.

Lord Blaydon still followed her, enamoured, and by the evident hopes which he continued to cherish of prevailing on her

her to favour his suit, added to the distress and perplexity which was preying on her very existence. Her parents never seemed unkind, except when they spoke of lord Blaydon; and as she had allowed his merits, and her want of preference for any of the other young men by whom she was surrounded, both them and lady Langfield accused her of caprice in her rejection of his addresses, nay, appeared half inclined to suspect that her reserve proceeded from coquetry alone.

This was cruel, and Isabella's secret tears fell bitterly over their injustice.

She assured lord Blaydon, as delicately as possible, that her heart would never respond to his wishes; but he, approved by her parents, encouraged by lady Langfield, and a passionate lover

himself, would not believe so blighting a declaration against his own happiness, and with the most tender assiduity, continued to render her his homage.

He had many rivals to contend with him for the prize. Heiress to such wealth, and possessed of beauty so rare, Isabella was a very magnet of attraction, and followed by crowds, that made an idol of her. Yet his lordship had no cause for jealousy; Isabella was cold to all the adulation that was offered to her —so cold, that, at times, she resembled more a beautiful statue, than a woman whom loveliness and admiration should have rendered animated.

A niece of Mr. Amherst's was at this period to be married; she was gay and fashionable, and scarcely fancied that the common order of the people were formed

formed of the same materials as the higher. Isabella was to be her bride-maid, and had often to sustain the regrets of her cousin, who was a keen advocate for lord Blaydon, that she was not to be a bride also, along with herself. She rallied Isabella with great spirit on her sailor *protégé*, nor dreamed of the daggers which every word of that fatal pleasantry inflicted in the quivering heart of that unhappy girl.

They went out together one morning to choose some bridal finery, when, in passing along Oxford-street, Isabella uttered a smothered cry of astonishment, and half started from her seat. The near overturn of a coach close by them saved her agitation from remark, but did not relieve her from the confusion and upbraidings of her own mind. Her

eye, by chance, had glanced over the pedestrian passengers; a face that seemed to be familiar to her memory rivetted her gaze. With startling look she examined more earnestly the person—it was—could she mistake him?—it was the missionary of Obeyda!

It was the missionary of Obeyda, changed—but not like her, to bloom and splendour—he was thin and emaciated, stooping feebly over his staff, and his threadbare coat seemed silently to say, that his fortunes partook of the decay of his health. The day was cold, and the streets dirty. The missionary walked slow and weary through them, with drooping looks, as if he thought none saw him that cared how shelterless his sickly frame might be.

Isabella saw him; yet she passed on!

warm

warm in her comfortable carriage, she rolled along, and left the missionary, without one greeting word from her whom his hut had sheltered, and his cupboard had provided for, when none else had mercy upon the friendless stranger. Friendless! no, no; she had then a friend with her, whom the world could not match! but she had forsaken him—thrown herself from the honest arms of love and faith, into the ever-sinking gulf of falsehood and ingratitude, and in their fatal consequences, she saw herself dragged past the missionary, as if her heart partook willingly of the cruelty of her conduct. That heart grew cold, and heavy as lead; not one tear would rise, to cool her burning eye, a death-like calm was over every sense, and a voice seemed to

sound in the bottom of her soul, like a knell—"Can God have mercy on thee more?"

Her cousin in vain called on her to admire and assist in choosing her attire; Isabella saw not by what she was surrounded—a dream of other lands was alone in her abstracted vision; the busy streets faded from her gaze, their noisy bustle died upon her hearing, and in their stead arose a lowly hut, shaded by the plantain and the palm, and the rapid rush of the Zadalquiver, as it rolled its clear stream from the deep deserts to the green and open valleys of Obeyda. The scene was fair; but that alone formed not the charm of memory: the lofty palm waved not over the cottage in solitude, its master stood at the threshold, placid and benevolent as

when

when he bade the weary enter and rest; the beams of the evening lay soft upon his brow, beneficent in their ray, like the pure charity of his own soul. Beside him sat a girl, answering him with her lips, but her eyes directed to a young man, who was dressing fruit for her close by. He wore the sailor's jacket, and his brown and ruddy cheek glowed, like the sparkling of his dark eye, as its animated glances strayed often and fondly to the smiling girl by his side.

So passed the dream over Isabella's soul—it went, but left not thought behind it; she fell, silently fainting, by her cousin, who, in extreme alarm, ordered the coachman to drive instantly home.

CHAPTER IX.

THE constitution of the missionary was delicate, and unable to combat against the climate of Obeyda. Three months after the departure of Isabella and Somerton, he was obliged to resign the situation, and return to Britain, worse in health, and no better in purse, than when he had left it.

No cheering home awaited the poor missionary; an only sister, whom fate had early widowed, he found lamenting the death of her last child, and struggling equally between grief and penury. In this sad lot, it was the mercy of God that

that the brother and sister should be strongly attached to each other, and willing to share together whatever Providence might allot to them.

Their father had once been a considerable merchant in the city; but adversity overtook him in the latter part of his life, and his death was that of a bankrupt and broken-hearted man. His son wished to pursue the career of the church, which he had begun; but the want of fortune was soon followed by the want of friends; and after many years of sore difficulties, he gave up hope at home, and embarked for South America, to be missionary at Obeyda.

From his first arrival, the climate began to war with his constitution; but for two years did the missionary strive against it, until his health completely broke;

broke; and, as a last resource from death, he was necessitated to give up his post, and return, poor as he had left it, to his native land.

He sought a home with his sister, and after some little rest had been yielded to his shattered constitution, he began to look about for a few boys to teach, to earn a subsistence for his humble and unobtrusive life. He succeeded in gaining five or six scholars; and it was on his way to attend on the father of one of the boys, that his feeble frame, and sickly countenance, caught the recognizing look of Isabella.

His errand was not agreeable; the man he went to see was vulgar and illiterate, uncompassionating the long walk which the feeble missionary had taken to wait on him, and insisting rudely that

that his son should learn in three months what the cleverest boy could not acquire in less than twelve. A heavy sigh stole from the missionary's heart as he turned from this unfeeling man; and, in painful ruminations on his cheerless destiny, he retraced his weary steps to his sister's house.

It was late in the day when he gladly rested himself from his fatiguing walk, and sat musing, in the darkening twilight, on the many woes which some are doomed to encounter in their passage to the grave.

While thus, in sorrowful thought, counting the lonely moments as they glided tediously over, a knock was struck on the outer door, and in a second, a buoyant, but firm step, passed quickly up stairs. The door of the missionary's

room

room opened, and a tall, athletic figure, appeared in the gloom. The missionary, uncertain in the dubious light who his visitor might be, rose to approach him, when the stranger, rapidly advancing, exclaimed, with animated tone —"What! Mr. Parson himself!" and the missionary's hand was instantly clasped in the warm and affectionate grasp of Somerton.

"How did you find me out?" asked the missionary, when the first cordial salutations of meeting were over; "I thought we had parted never to meet again."

"Avast there, Mr. Parson," replied Somerton; "out of sight is not out of mind with me; you gave me your English address at Obeyda, so I thought as I was in London, I might just ask about you,

you, although I did not fancy I was to meet yourself. So you have left your savage hut, and come to live in a Christian land?"

"I left it soon after your departure," answered the missionary; "my health would not permit my stay."

"I am sorry for your bad health," said Somerton, kindly, "though I think it was a happy day for you when you quitted those infernal barbarians."

"No, it was not," replied the missionary, with a pensive shake of the head. "I had some income at Obeyda; here," and he sighed deeply, "I have none."

"Sick and pennyless," said Somerton, with feeling. "Mr. Parson, can't we strike a light? I have some guineas to count, and I can't see in this confounded darkness."

A light

A light was immediately procured; it showed a strange contrast between the two men. Somerton seemed in an exuberance of health; his face might show marks of hard service, yet still it bore the polish and the glow of youth; and his figure, knit in manly symmetry, displayed, in every proportion, fulness and strength. The missionary stooped as if he hung over the grave; his face was yielding to the furrows of sickness and age—pale, and worn, and haggard, it was like a head risen from the dead; and his frame, attenuated to the last degree, was shrunk into the most wasted emaciation.

Somerton gazed at him for a minute in silence, then falteringly said—"Why, what the devil have you been doing with yourself, Mr. Parson? Whilst I thought

thought you snug amongst the savages, here have you been dying amongst your friends."

"But you have been well, Somerton," said the missionary; "your looks testify that. How is my old friend Isabella? Is your wife in town with you?"

Somerton half started from his seat; he turned away, as in pain, and in a subdued voice, said—"Don't talk of that, Mr. Parson; I hav'n't my pretty Bella now."

"How!—dead!" said the missionary, in a tone of dismay.

"No; but she left me, Mr. Parson," replied Somerton, sadly, and shaking his head. "She left poor Jack in his distress; but for all that, I trust she got into better harbour than she left me in."

"How am I to understand you?" demanded

manded the missionary. "Isabella was surely one of the best and purest young creatures that could exist. Where and when did you lose her?"

"Right on our arrival at Buenos Ayres," replied Somerton. "You saw the damned squabs we set out with, Mr. Parson; they took it into their infernal heads that the men should sleep in one tent, and the women in another; so, in spite of all I could say, my pretty Bella was laid along side of them, instead of with her own honest tar. In this cursed way we reached Buenos Ayres; and scarcely had we arrived, Mr. Parson, when my pretty Bella disappeared, and from that day to this I have neither seen nor heard of her more."

"It is astonishing!" said the missionary. "Could those villanous sailors have

have had any hand in her disappearance?"

"The devil must have his due," returned Somerton; "they had not. We were eating together—they and I, and some others of the passengers, when my pretty Bella, who was left in another room, started up, the women said, and ran out of the house like lightning. I thought my heart would break, Mr. Parson, when I found she was gone. I rushed out after her, and sought her up and down; some told me she had gone this street, some that street, but of all the streets I traversed, none proved to be the right one. I had no rest that night, Mr. Parson. In the morning, I commenced my search again, and went down to the quays to find out if she could have gone on board any of the ships

ships bound for England; but as I could not make the inquiries without a boat, and as I had no cash to hire one, I only stood looking at the ships, and, like a fool, wishing I had wings to fly to them. Well, Mr. Parson, you may think I was a hapless devil upon that shore—cast away from my own good ship, without a friend or a shilling, and cheated and deserted by my lass. I thought it was all up with Jack Somerton, and fancied I had but to lie down on the beach and die. But, Mr. Parson, as the song says, 'there's a sweet little cherub sits smiling aloft;' so, as I strolled along as sad as man could be, what should I spy but three or four of my messmates of the Adrastus! Could I have got my pretty Bella out of my head, this meeting would have nearly put me mad with joy,

joy, for they told me that the Adrastus lay down the river a few miles, and that they had come up with some of the officers. I got many a hearty welcome back from the jaws of death from my comrades; and even the officers, and my captain, to whom I went immediately to report myself, not only rejoiced in my safety, but gave me a handful of dollars to rig myself out as a man of war's man ought to be, for I was then but a shabby-looking devil amongst them. Then, Mr. Parson, I hurried back to where I had lost my pretty Bella, but there were no tidings of her, and the two sailors stood grinning at my anxiety. You may believe I was not in a merry mood; so I bethought me of the debt I owed them, and with right good will set to pay it. We were soon two to one;

but the honest arm prevailed, and they got a licking, Mr. Parson, that will keep Jack Somerton a good while in their memory. I left the half of my dollars in charge of the woman of the inn, to give to my pretty Bella, if she should ever come in her way; and every day while the Adrastus remained in port, I went to inquire about my lass; but I heard no more of her, and in ten days sailed from Buenos Ayres, to which place I have never since returned."

"She was ungrateful, Somerton, to leave you in such a silent manner," said the missionary. "But did you not mention the circumstance when you got on board the Adrastus? Your comrades might have assisted in your search."

"They might, Mr. Parson; but I did not put much faith in their assistance.—Besides,

Besides, had they known I had been served so by a girl, there would have been no end to their gibing and jeering. But come, Mr. Parson, grieving wont bring back my lass, so here is some of the store I have brought home for you," and as he spoke he drew out a leathern purse, and poured from it a tolerable quantity of guineas.

"I am glad to see you so rich, Somerton," said the missionary. "Is this prize-money?"

"Yes, and plenty more behind it," answered he; and pushing the gold over to the missionary—"Take it, Mr. Parson, and a sailor's blessing along with it."

"I take it, dear Somerton!" said the missionary, drawing back—"I deprive you—rob you of your hard-won store!"

"It has all along been for you and

yours," replied Somerton. "The Adrastus has been lucky in her prizes within the last year; and while I was making rich, did you think I was the ungrateful lubber to forget you, who had given so much, when no return could be made?"

"I expected nothing, Somerton," said the missionary earnestly. "The little I had in my power to give was bestowed without a wish of any reward, but kind remembrance."

"I know it, Mr. Parson; and once I thought that was all I should ever have it in my power to offer you; but fortune smiled on poor Jack; and may she never smile on me again, if I forget to share her store with the friend who assisted me in adversity!"

"I cannot—I cannot, dear Somerton," said the missionary, almost overpowered.

"But

"But you must, Mr. Parson, and there's an end to the argument. I tell you, I did not expect to see you here; but as I was in London, I thought I might ask about you, and put that little bag in my jacket, to let your friends know that you had done a kind turn to one who had not forgotten it. So you see, Mr. Parson, the gold belongs either to you or yours; but as it happens that you are at home, why, if it be all one to you, I would rather you owned it yourself. So the matter being settled, suppose you let us see what is in your cupboard? I have had a good walk, and could eat a bit, as well as drink your health, Mr. Parson."

The missionary, weakened by disease, and unaccustomed to the voice of friendship beyond his own poor dwell-

ing, was unable at the moment to speak; he placed his wasted hand upon his brow, and bending down his head, tried in vain to repress his sobs.

They startled Somerton; he hastened to the missionary, and taking him kindly by the shoulder, said—"Mr. Parson, I fear the world has not gone well with you. Cheer up, for God's sake; I cannot stand this work. While I have, or can make, my last penny shall be shared with you, Mr. Parson."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed the missionary, in a broken voice; then giving nature way, he threw himself upon Somerton's breast, and wept aloud.

Somerton attempted not to speak; he supported, with the utmost tenderness, the decaying frame of the missionary, and

and gazed upon his agitated countenance with deep emotion struggling in his own.

"Pardon this weakness, if such must be called the feelings that burst unrepressed from a man's heart," said the missionary, gently rising off Somerton's breast; "I had almost forgotten what hope or friendship was; the voice of both has spoken from your lips, Somerton, and my sick soul fails beneath the joy it has been so long a stranger to." The missionary laid his head on one hand, and with the other slowly wiped off the tears that were coursing down his wan cheeks.

Somerton took two or three turns up and down the room in silence, then stopping abruptly, said—"Mr. Parson, I must be off; I can't stand this; d—n me, I would sooner be on the fore deck

in the heat of action, than in sight of grief. You set my heart a going, God knows how. I'll be back to-morrow."

"Stay, stay," cried the missionary, leaving his chair, and moving to detain Somerton. "Do not leave me, nor feel too much at sight of my tears; they are shed by an infirm old man, more in delight than sorrow. Sit down; and the first use I shall make of your bounty, will be to procure for us a more comfortable supper than I have tasted for a long time."

Somerton sat down, and the missionary, as resolute to combat his emotion, bustled about, and called his sister, to give her money for what they should require.

Mrs. Bower looked in astonishment at her brother, when she saw the heap

of

of gold which still lay on the table.—"What is this, William?" asked she, in doubting amazement.

"Do not ask me," said the missionary, his voice beginning to falter again. "I got it all from *him*," and his glistening eye pointed to the kind-hearted sailor.

"Mistress, we want supper," said Somerton, impatient to silence the matter. "If you have any curiosity to know any thing of Jack Somerton, Mr. Parson will tell you to-morrow. To-night let us eat and drink something, that's all."

The missionary's eye corresponded to Somerton's request; Mrs. Bower forbore to question further, and departed to procure a supper: she soon returned with a comfortable one, and spreading

it out, she sat down with them to a feast compared to her ordinary fare.

When the meal was over, Mrs. Bower, who had a little shop of tapes, threads, &c. went to arrange it, and look it up for the night; and as she left the room, the missionary said—"I forgot to inquire after your father, Somerton. I trust your kindness to me does not interfere with your duty to him?"

"No, Mr. Parson," answered Somerton, shaking his head, "nothing more can interfere with him. There was I, when at sea, always thinking, when any good came across me, my old dad will rejoice at this; and as soon as I landed, and got my pay, I hastened to share it with him; but a cold home awaited me, Mr. Parson; no one was there to say, Jack, welcome from sea.

My

My poor dad was dead and buried—laid in his grave, when I was fancying he would be giving me a thought now and then, as I was giving him. And the worst of it was, I found a letter, which he should have got, had he lived, about some long story of a legacy, left him by a relation in town. I showed the letter to my captain, who, God bless him, has ever had a friendly word to give to poor Jack, and he said I should be off to London immediately, where I could get my legacy and prize-money both. So here am I, adrift from all kindred harbour, without a friend to care whether poor Jack sinks or swims."

The missionary grasped his hand reproachfully, as he said—"Somerton, do you think of me?"

"I only mean in the relation way,

Mr. Parson," replied Somerton, kindly; "I don't think I have sailed through the world so long, without getting the good wishes of some honest hearts; and I count yours amongst them, Mr. Parson."

"Praise from you is pleasing, Somerton," said the missionary; "for it is true, so far as your opinion goes."

It was late for the missionary's feeble health ere they parted; and before they did so, it was agreed between them, and willingly assented to by Mrs. Bower, that Somerton should come the following day, and take possession of a small room, which she kept always vacant for a lodger.

The missionary in part returned the friendship of Somerton; the legacy would have been but poorly accounted for,

for, to the careless, generous sailor, had no one been by who had his interest at heart, and known more of business than he did. With the assistance of the missionary, the transaction was properly arranged, and Somerton paid nearly three hundred pounds. He offered it wholly to the missionary, and was half inclined to be angry that it was refused. —"What the devil am I to do with it, Mr. Parson, if you won't take it?" said he. "I have sixty pounds of prize-money, and my pay going on, as the ship is only laid up for a few weeks, to get repaired. I can't spend it, that's clear."

"Nor must not spend it," said the missionary; "do not be improvident, Somerton, and forget the times that may come, and the time that will surely come, should life be spared to you, when

when your youth will no longer remain to support you; and old age will come sadly on, if dependent on the charity of others. Be advised by me; put that legacy, and whatever other money you can spare, into some secure bank; it will always be bearing interest, however little, and, with what I pray you may yet make, will form a resource to you from the wants and dependence of age."

"And am I, a stout young fellow, to take such care of myself, and leave you to starve, Mr. Parson?" said Somerton, warmly: "your advice might be good to those who think only of themselves; but here am I beside you, Mr. Parson, and my head shall be low when you know a want again that my store can shield you from."

"You overpower me beyond reply," said

said the missionary. He stopped, unable to speak, then falteringly added, "My dear Somerton, you make the small service I did to you of far more value than it deserves. I gave you but the relief which one Christian should bestow on another, unthinking, God be my judge, of ever meeting you, or even hearing of you again."

"I have believed that long ago," replied Somerton, "but as I am a Christian like yourself—no offence, Mr. Parson, I don't mean to compare myself to you—only to say, that I hope I am so much of a Christian, that a kind turn done me will never slip out of my mind. Yet, after all, I cannot say the remembrance is so much for myself; I was a rough fellow, ready for any hardship; but the girl, Mr. Parson——no, d——n it,

it, let us speak no more of that; I can't think of her, and keep a stout heart."

"You may hear some tidings of her yet," said the missionary, sympathizing deeply with the emotion that Somerton was struggling to subdue. "I cannot think her desertion was deliberate ingratitude, or the effects of an unfeeling heart. She seemed fondly attached to you, Somerton; but then she was so young, that the idea of being married to you, in such a manner as your union was brought on, and surrounded by strangers, who you say were some of them unkind and others negligent, might be easily supposed to have caused her some alarm."

"But whither could she fly but amongst strangers?" asked Somerton.

"Probably to some of the friends of her

her late mistress," answered the missionary; "you know they had come from Buenos Ayres."

Somerton struck his head.—"My God, Mr. Parson, and I never thought of that! I was so distracted about her loss, and flurried with regaining my ship, that only those two ideas ever entered my mind. Surely I might have heard of her, or got some clue to find her by, had I made inquiries about Mr. Amherst at Buenos Ayres; he had but just left that place, and was a man of too much consequence to be so soon forgotten. I cannot repair my folly now."

"Do not altogether despair," said the missionary, consolingly. "In my father's days, I knew a great American merchant; he is still alive, and though I have

have not gone near him in my adversity, yet for your sake, Somerton, I will visit him, and inquire concerning the late Mr. Amherst: he must, from his business, have heard of him, and may probably know something of his family."

"And will they know any thing of my pretty Bella?" said Somerton, half hesitating to resign himself to the hope that was already beginning to sparkle in his eyes.

"It is likely they may," replied the missionary; "the circumstance of the death of Mr. and Mrs. Amherst was too lamentable and impressive, not to make the young attendant of the lady at the fatal period, of some interest to the remaining branches of the family."

"By Heaven, Mr. Parson!" exclaimed

ed Somerton, bounding from his seat with joy, "if you recover for me my pretty Bella, you shall take the legacy, whether you will or not!"

"It is then you will find need for it yourself," said the missionary, smiling.

"I don't know what to say, Mr. Parson," said Somerton, rubbing his hand on his brow—"you have put my brain reeling. When will you make this inquiry?"

"To-morrow, Somerton. I will not delay, when it is to oblige you."

CHAP-

CHAPTER X.

Isabella attended her cousin's marriage, a lovely, but a pensive bridemaid. The gay festivities she mingled in could not chace away the sadness that was corroding her heart: the image of the missionary, drooping beneath sickness and poverty, was ever present to her recollection, poisoning, with the remembrance of her ingratitude, every outward comfort that surrounded her. Nor was that her only care; the idea of the hideous sailor continually alarmed her. Was it upon his tongue that her fame hung? —had he but to speak, to render her suspecte

pected by her parents, and scorned by the world?—was her father never to weary giving to a wretch who never ceased to require?—"Oh God, and when he does, what is to become of me, exposed without help to that monster's demands?" Such was often the exclamation of Isabella, as she pressed in tears and despair her sleepless pillow.

That time did come; scarcely a week subsequent to Mr. Amherst's procuring a situation for the sailor, he received a note from one of the gentlemen from whom he had procured it, regretting that they were obliged to turn off the man whom he had recommended as a porter to them, having found him drunken, idle, and worthless, from the very first day of his commencing his employment.

Isabella

Isabella heard the note read in silent horror, while Mrs. Amherst remarked, that nothing good could be expected from the man's looks.

The sailor had the assurance to call that same day, and upon Mr. Amherst's telling him that he could do nothing more for him in the way of getting a situation, and recommending him to go to sea again, he spoke in a very insolent manner, and said he was sure Miss Amherst would never see him want on shore.

Mr. Amherst was highly indignant at the fellow's manner, and giving him some silver, said, that however much his daughter and he might wish to befriend him, he must recollect that bad conduct might even wear out that wish.

After

After this interview, Isabella knew not what peace was. She saw her father displeased with the sailor, and by the minute, expected when the dreadful demand was to be made upon herself.

This anxiety of mind extended involuntarily to her manner; she started at every opening of the door, and a tremour ever came over her, when the servant began to speak.

Her mother observed this, and often said to her, that she was sure some disagreeable matter weighed on her mind, and urged her to disclose it, assuring her that her mother's sympathy would be hers.

There were moments when the cause of her sorrow almost burst from the lips of Isabella, but the fear of her father's wrath withheld the fatal confession: she had

had deceived him with a falsehood at first, and now she had suffered him to be the dupe of the horrid imposture of the sailor—allowed him to reward the miscreant who had attempted to outrage his daughter.

One morning, while the family were assembled at breakfast, a shabby-looking note was delivered to Isabella. The colour of the poor girl receded to an ashy hue, as she stretched out her trembling hand to receive it.

"Who is it from?" demanded her father quickly, noticing her extreme confusion.

"Some petition," replied Isabella, faintly.

"Let me see it," said Mr. Amherst, in a voice so stern that she durst not refuse to deliver it to him.

"William

"William Oldham!" said Mr. Amherst, loudly, as he glanced at the signature; "what does that fellow say?" and he read the note without reserve.

"MISS,

"Seeing as how I am turned adrift for no fault of mine, I think it but fair to let you know that I am in distress, and hope you will relieve me.

"MISS,

"WILLIAM OLDHAM."

"Poor wretch, send him a guinea," said Mrs. Amherst; "I wish he would go to sea again."

"There is nothing here to excite alarm, Isabella," said her father, eyeing her sharply. "The note is quite civil."

Isabella was too much agitated to reply: she got up from table without knowing what she did, but had not gone two or three steps towards the door, when she sunk down fainting on the carpet.

Her father hastened to support her, but the fit continuing, she was carried to her own chamber, where her upper garment was thrown open to give her air. In throwing it widely back, her mother perceived a gold chain round her neck. She pulled it from the bosom of the senseless girl, and with astonishment beheld it to suspend a pierced dollar. She put it, however, quietly into her pocket, unwilling to make any remarks before the maids, and anxiously assisted to recover the unconscious sufferer.

Recollection slowly returned to Isabella; her languid eyes sought those of her mother, as if in doubt what had happened to her; when suddenly starting up, she clasped both hands round her neck, and uttered an agitated cry.

"I have your chain, Isabella," said Mrs. Amherst, who was now alone with her daughter, and producing it from her pocket. "It bears a singular sort of memento."

Isabella grew crimson as she had before been pale: she uttered not a word, but took the chain from the offering hand of her mother.

Mrs. Amherst paused for a few seconds, in the hope of some reply from Isabella; but finding her continue silent, she added—"I have long suspected that some remembrance was preying

on your mind—that dollar satisfies me that my conjecture was right, and that the object who has caused you such uneasiness is or was in America. My dear child, you did wrong to be so reserved to your mother; there was no feeling of your heart that you would not have found me to sympathize in, nor any regrets that I would not have tried to alleviate."

Isabella had hid her face in the pillow as her mother spoke, and now her sobs burst forth quick and suffocating.

Mrs. Amherst, alarmed at her agitation, attempted to lift her head; but Isabella resisted the effort, and still concealing her face, faltered—" I cannot look up."

" Not from shame, I trust, of an inferior choice?" said Mrs. Amherst, a thrill

of

of apprehension seizing her.—"In my brother's house, no company could surely be introduced to you that was not your equal?"

Again was Isabella's confession checked, just as she was about to pour it out on her mother's bosom. Her choice was inferior—so lowly, that her mother, in her greatest alarm, could not dream of any thing so obscure. She wept till her senses nearly left her again, and all she could say, clasping the dollar, was—"Mother, this is all. Nothing more remains!"

Mrs. Amherst mentioned this discovery to her husband, and expressed her fears that some improper attachment had captivated Isabella's heart deeper than what was usual in one so young as she.

Mr. Amherst was hurt and grieved at the intelligence which his wife gave him; he had become suspicious that some recollection which they knew not of disturbed the mind of his daughter, when her thoughts were recalled to the memory of the shipwreck; and resolved, if possible, to end or subdue an agitation which so severely preyed upon her peace, he determined to question the sailor more strictly than ever upon the event, the next time he should call, regretting that he had sent him relief that day without seeing him.

Isabella dreaded now to be alone with her father or mother, fearing a renewal of the subject of the dollar; she attempted gay spirits, to deceive them into forgetfulness, and laughed and rallied in company,

company, when her only feeling was to exclaim—"My heart is breaking!"

Her parents, however, did not intend to take a cruel advantage of the discovery which chance had enabled them to make of the cause of their daughter's pensiveness. The object of her attachment, even if alive, was probably separated from her for ever, or, as Mr. Amherst strongly suspected, was lost in the Diana, along with her uncle and aunt.

They had compassion on their child, and while they marked, well pleased, the exertion which she was making to overcome, or to hide her sadness, they sacrificed on their part also, and forbore, at present, to press further the suit of lord Blaydon.

A calm at this time seemed to spread itself over Isabella and her parents; they

were no longer made uneasy by her languor, or strange fits of agitation; and she in thankfulness wondered to see a week slip past, and no appearance or demand of the ruffian sailor.

She was engaged one of these evenings to a ball at her new-married cousin's. Lady Langfield, who was to be of the party, had arrived, and was sitting with her parents and Isabella ready dressed, chatting away the minutes, until the appointed hour, when a servant entered, and said a sailor wished to see Miss Amherst.

Isabella's assumed spirits vanished; her colour fled, and, in a trepidation beyond concealment, she hastily cried—"I cannot see him."

"Desire him to come hither immediately," said Mr. Amherst.

"No;

" No; oh no, father, do not bring him here!" cried Isabella, forgetting all caution in her alarm.

" Send him up instantly," said Mr. Amherst, loudly, to the servant, who had not yet departed to obey his orders.

The footman retired, and Isabella burst into tears.

" I *will* know the meaning of this agitation," said Mr. Amherst, in ruffled accents.

Isabella spoke not, until she heard steps ascending the stairs; when starting from her chair, she clasped her hands, and wildly exclaimed, quite lost to all presence of mind—" Oh, father, do not hear him; I will tell you all!"

The cheek of Mr. Amherst blanched, and with a look of horror he exclaimed

 —" Merciful

—" Merciful God!—what all? Has the villain dared——"

Horrible apprehension choaked his words: he stood staring at his daughter, with a look livid and ghastly.

" No!" shrieked Isabella, half mad; and as the door opened, she flung herself in wild despair upon her mother's bosom.

" What do you want with Miss Amherst?" said Mr. Amherst, sternly.

" I want to know if she is the Isabella Amherst I once knew," replied the unwelcome intruder.

Ah! Isabella looked wildly and instantly up—screamed in delirious ecstacy—flew towards the sailor—precipitated herself at his feet, exclaiming—" Somerton!—Forgive me!"

It was indeed Somerton. He raised her,

her, and strained her to his breast, in speechless transport like herself.

Mrs. Amherst and lady Langfield uttered an astonished and indignant cry, as they beheld Isabella in the arms of the stranger; and Mr. Amherst, with angry surprise, advanced towards them, and seizing his daughter by the shoulder, said—"What means this frantic conduct? How dare you, fellow, presume to use Miss Amherst so?"

"She is my wife," replied Somerton, retaining Isabella round the waist, while her face lay buried on his breast.

"Wife!" repeated Mr. Amherst.

"Wife!" echoed Mrs. Amherst; while lady Langfield, in speechless consternation, sunk back upon the sofa, from which she had just arisen.

"Yes, my wife!" answered Somer-

ton. "It may be that you may think we should have waited your consent first; but we were in a cursed unchristian land, Mr. Amherst, where your daughter was forced to get spliced to me, or remain amongst the savages. Wasn't it so, my sweet lass?" looking down fondly on the still sinking Isabella.

"Fellow! are you mad?" exclaimed Mr. Amherst, stamping with his foot. "Isabella, wretched girl, have you nothing to say against this degrading falsehood?"

"I am an honest fellow, if you will," said Somerton, reddening; "but, damn me if I'll be called fellow by any body. I tell no lies, nor take the name from any one. Perhaps you think I come for some of your riches. Damn the gold

gold that would sway a faithful heart, say I! Give your blessing to the girl; I want nothing more; I have plenty of prize-money;" and as he spoke, he fondly kissed the half-exposed cheek of Isabella.

The sight increased Mr. Amherst's resentment; he would have torn Isabella from the arms of Somerton, but that the sailor's strong grasp firmly retained her trembling form.

"Are you so lost, Isabella? Do you not speak? Do you not deny? Leave him, shameless girl! Oh! are you so lost?" Such, and numberless other exclamations were uttered by Mrs. Amherst and lady Langfield, in all the incoherency of the most poignant distress.

Isabella raised her face; it was deathlike pale, yet a tender brilliancy was in her

her eye. Still encircled in the arms of Somerton, from which she motioned not to remove, she stretched out her hand to Mr. Amherst, and said, with deep pathos, while at the same time she looked alternately to her mother and sister—"Father, I am his wife. But for Somerton, you would have cursed the sea, that did not swallow me. Oh, father," and a deep blush crimsoned her cheek, "think it for me; I had no friend in the desert but him; he was my saviour there; and my faithful brother while I remained near him. A dreadful necessity united us. Frown not, dear father, that I married so far away; alas! though I stand so elevated now, I was then but the wretched wanderer, scorned to the very dust, existing but in the protection of this generous arm."

arm." She stopped, overpowered, and pressed the arm of Somerton against her heart.

Mrs. Amherst had melted into tears as her daughter spoke; lady Langfield seemed half inclined to weep also; and Mr. Amherst, although still dissatisfied, was no longer violent. He perceived there was something of which he had not yet heard, to be related concerning Isabella's shipwreck, and in a milder tone he said—"Let me judge of the merits which you wish to be ascribed to this sailor; if he be entitled to my gratitude for any service done to my child, he shall not have to complain that I failed in it."

Somerton, whose eyes had dropped in modest consciousness while Isabella had spoken of him, raised them at this remark,

mark, and with some warmth replied—"Your gratitude, Mr. Amherst, will be thrown away here; it is not wanted, nor was ever thought of; my pretty Bella can tell that Jack Somerton knew her only to be as poor as himself, when he was willing to lay down his life for her."

"Speak out, for God's sake!" said Mr. Amherst. "What am I to understand —what was Oldham?"

Somerton's eyes flashed fire; Isabella shrunk from their glance, and again hid her face on his shoulder.

"Oldham!" repeated Somerton.

"Yes, Oldham!" rejoined Mr. Amherst, quickly, "a sailor, who for many weeks past has hung upon this house, as one of those who assisted my daughter in her difficulties."

Somerton half raised Isabella on his arm;

arm; but her head adhered to his breast, as if it were glued there in shame.

"Who is Oldham?" again inquired Mr. Amherst, with doubting impatience.

"A ruffian!" replied Somerton, firmly.

"To Iabella's knowledge?" demanded Mr. Amherst.

"Father, do not curse me!" cried Isabella; and breaking unawares from the hold of Somerton, she flung herself at her father's feet, and fanticly clasped his knees.

"I am bewildered!" said Mr. Amherst, as he raised her: and her mother coming forward, threw her arms round the trembling girl, and said—"Isabella, explain this terrible mystery. Have lips that I once thought so ingenuous, only opened with falsehoods since you returned to us!"

"Oh,

"Oh, mother, do not kill me!" replied Isabella, weeping: "I did come back to you, in falsehood and ingratitude —Was I happy that pride had prevailed, and in a moment of alarm, allured me from my faith and my affection? Oh, all of you, have mercy upon me!—I fell from truth, and every after step but led me deeper into deceit and misery!"

There was such agony in Isabella's look and voice, that every heart present melted towards her in compassion.

Somerton advanced a few steps to where she stood with her mother, and snatching her to his breast, fondly and falteringly exclaimed—"Do not—do not weep! only say that though you left me, you did not forget me, and a syllable of the past shall never be breathed again!"

"I never

"I never forgot you," said Isabella, with tearful energy. "Pride mocked me for my sacrifice to it, and in the midst of grandeur, I have wished—ah! in anguish wished—to be with you again, poor and wandering in the desert."

The generous heart of Somerton overflowed beyond utterance; a flood of transport gushed to his eyes, and for a few seconds he hid his head on the neck of Isabella as she reclined on his bosom.

The emotion which Somerton displayed carried with it such genuine marks of truth, that Mr. Amherst, however astonished and indignant he might be, could not resist the involuntary assurance of his heart, that he was no longer in the presence of an impostor. He stood for a minute irresolute how to act, and in the pause which ensued, Mrs. Amherst,

Amherst, with streaming eyes, gazed on this unknown man, who seemed to possess such powerful and fatal influence over her daughter. Scarcely could she persuade herself that he was not a counterpart of the ruffian-looking Oldham, from whom even her maternal gratitude had ever shrunk; and with awakened surprise she remarked the untutored elegance of Somerton, as he stood in his jacket and trowsers, with all the smart exactness of dress which characterizes the man-of-war's man.

Lady Langfield had made the same observation as her mother, and sat in wonder and in tears, to view the result of so unexpected and afflicting a scene.

"Isabella," said her father, in a milder tone, and taking her hand, "sit down by

by your mother, until this extraordinary affair is explained."

Isabella hid her face as he removed her, and sinking her head on his arm, cried, scarce articulate—"Oh, father, forgive me—I am unworthy of your love more!"

"In the name of God, what is it I am to learn?" said Mr. Amherst, a new dread springing up to agitate him anew. "Let there be no more delay.—You were shipwrecked then with my daughter?" turning to Somerton.

A servant at that instant entered, to say the carriage was waiting.

"Order it away," replied Mr. Amherst, hastily; "we shall not go out to-night;" and as the door was reclosed, he again anxiously demanded the particulars

lars of the shipwreck, and its consequences.

Somerton immediately began the narration required, and described, in energetic though concise terms, the dreadful loss of the Diana, and the dreary and desolate shore that the few, so miraculously saved from the wreck, were cast away on.

His listeners shuddered at the recital; and as Isabella clung in recollecting horror to the bosom of her mother, that tender parent wrapped her arms convulsively round her, and in agony exclaimed—"My God! my God! does the mother nurse her darling, that it may be cast away so friendless and forlorn?"

"Go on, Somerton," said Mr. Amherst,

herst, much affected. "My unfortunate child!"

Somerton proceeded; but as he advanced in his recital, and finding that he could not continue it without making more mention of himself than his generous heart could brook, he stopped abruptly short, and with an honest blush mantling on his cheek, said—"What signifies talking more of the matter—we got safe through the desert any how: but if you want to hear the whole of our cruise, there's Mr. Parson knows it word for word, and he will tell you."

"Who is Mr. Parson?" demanded Mr. Amherst.

"What! not heard of the missionary of Obeyda?" exclaimed Somerton, incredulously.

"Was he one of those who had compassion

passion on you in the Indian village?" again demanded Mr. Amherst.

"One of them!" said Somerton, emphatically—"why he was the only one! If it had not been for Mr. Parson, who took us to his hut, and shared his little store with us, when the rest of the village scouted us like wild beasts, the bones of my pretty Bella and me might have been whitening in the valley of Obeyda by this time."

"Unhappy girl!" said Mr. Amherst, in a tone between reproof and pity, "what fatal event has driven you to seek such concealment?"

While these facts of the shipwreck were laying open, the heart of Isabella was a prey to the most torturing sensations—pride no longer threw its veil over her ingratitude; it had long been failing

failing in its support, and now abandoned her to all that self-abasement and reproach, which a generous and sensible mind ever feels at the recollection of its own misconduct. All the past rose up to crush her, without one palliating view: Somerton, the saviour of her life and her honour, and her husband, she had inhumanly forsaken—the good missionary, whose charity and benevolence had succoured her, when all other help was denied, she had seen his feeble and sickly steps, tottering through the wet and the cold streets, and yet she had passed on, rich and warm—since her return, she had been a continual deceit to her parents, mocking them with an imposture, which, now explained, would make her as abhorrent to them as it had made her to herself. She rose to fly

from the room, to hide herself for ever from their sight. Somerton caught her as she passed.—"Whither so fast, my sweet lass," cried he—"not to leave me again?"

"Do not stop me," cried she, wildly, and struggling to break from his detaining hold: "you hate me—my father—my mother—my sister—all must hate me: my ungrateful heart should break."

"My child, my child!" exclaimed her mother, hastily advancing to her, "do not wring our hearts by so cruel a suspicion; if the unreflectingness of youth has led you into error, sad and unhappy has been your expiation of it. I can now discover the cause of your constant depression, and carelessness of those pleasures so naturally attractive to youth.

My

My poor child, whose earliest thoughts were full of truth and gratitude, what must have been your grief when both accused you!"

"Isabella lay powerless, and sobbing, between her mother and Somerton.—"My sweet Bella," uttered he, in fond and overpowered accents, "when my heart ceases to love you, it will no longer beat in poor Jack's breast. You say you have never forgotten me; and as I have my sweet wife once more, the word nor the thought shall never vex you again that I can help."

The expression of wife grated discordantly on Mr. Amherst's ear; but for the present unheeding it, he rejoined—"I would say much against the concealment which Isabella has practised towards us, were I not aware now that

she has long suffered the punishment of it in the recesses of her own heart; and this I will say in her favour, that when she can forget the imposition which she has suffered her father to be the dupe of, in allowing him to applaud and reward that villain Oldham, and the outrage which she has done to her own dignity, in suffering him to remain a second instant in her presence, she must have a heart of a far more unfeeling nature than I believe she possesses.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XI.

A DEAD silence reigned, as Mr. Amherst concluded; all felt that the last sentence he had uttered, conveyed, in disguised terms, as severe a reproof as could be uttered. Isabella's colour came and went, as if she would have fainted; and the kind heart of Somerton sent its best blood to his cheek, as he tenderly and sympathizingly gazed on her.

Mr. Amherst was the first to renew the conversation; he motioned them to be seated again, and said—"I am convinced, Somerton, that my daughter and her friends owe a life of gratitude to

you for her preservation. I am willing to be as grateful as father could be, for such an obligation; yet deep as is my sense of it, I cannot extend it to giving her to you for a wife: your rank in life is so different from hers, that you cannot expect such a reward."

"Had I never seen your daughter but as she now is," replied Somerton, eyeing the splendid dress of Isabella, and the richly-furnished room, "it is likely I never should have dreamed of such a reward, nor even lifted a thought to her. But when I met her first, Mr. Amherst, your rank and your gold were unseen, and unknown of things: she was a pale, drooping girl, spoiled of all this fine gear, laid friendless, and nearly dying, on a desert shore, and thrown for all aid and protection on a poor tar, whose

whose life had been as rough as the waves he had just escaped from. It is true, I was no gentleman; but I knew not she was a lady; and a sailor's heart can like a pretty lass as well as the first lord's in the kingdom. We had not been long together, when I loved her dearly and honestly; but seeing she had no one but me to look to, I said nothing of all I felt for her, and only bade her consider me as a brother, while she was in distress, or away from her home; but when she returned thither, it was my intention to tell her I had given her my heart, and ask her to swing in a sailor's hammock. I cannot speak in your gentle phrase, Mr. Amherst, but all that I could have done for my pretty Bella, even had that all included my life, I was ready to do for her.

"An unforeseen necessity made me her husband, at a distance from her home, and unknown to her parents—that right I will yield to no man breathing; but I want none of your riches, Mr. Amherst. To be sure she is in glorious trim," continued Somerton, gazing on Isabella with rapturous admiration; "but you may unrig her of it to the last stay!—I want only my own sweet lass, such as I got her from the missionary at Obeyda."

As soon as he stopped, Mr. Amherst said—"Your sentiments do not require the aid of fine language to set them off, Somerton; honesty has an eloquence bestowed by nature alone; your heart is on your lips and in your eyes, beyond disguise. But you are not aware, that from the circumstances attending your marriage,

marriage, and Isabella's being under age at the time it took place, that the law may invalidate your union. I honour your conduct, and most sincerely esteem your character; yet your rank precludes all hope that I can receive you as my son-in-law. I have interest to procure you promotion, and wealth at your service besides. Content yourself with that, Somerton, and quietly resign all claim to Isabella; nor force me to proceed to extremities with one to whom we all owe so much, and for whom we are willing to do so much."

While Mr. Amherst spoke, his wife and lady Langfield looked at Isabella, with eyes full of congratulation, yet mingled with doubt.

Somerton's countenance changed from red to pale alternately; he gazed on Isa-

bella in a bewildered silence, as if life itself depended on her tongue.

She stood downcast, nor interrupted her father; but the moment he ceased, she said, in low, yet firm accents—"Father, I am Somerton's wife; when I dissolve my union with him, I must sever myself also from all good and grateful feeling. The law shall never interfere between him and me, unless to make our union more secure; yet I do not regret that I know it might do so, as Somerton will now be entirely convinced, that affection, not necessity, is the bond of his claim over me. I left him from that pride, father, which now urges you to separate us; but I have found its inefficacy to heal the heart, that conscience and undying attachment made sore. Somerton," and she gently withdrew herself

herself from her mother's arms, "if you can pardon me, take me, and may we never separate again!"

Somerton clasped her in speechless transport to his heart, and in that silent and mutual embrace, Mr. and Mrs. Amherst, and lady Langfield, saw the final close to all their ambitious desires, of a brilliant establishment for Isabella.

It was useless to offer more obstacles to a union, that Heaven itself appeared to have led to a completion; although Mr. Amherst had pride, he possessed sense and reason also, and overcoming the former, the latter convinced him that further opposition would only tend to disunite a member from their family, who was too firmly lodged in all their affections, to be absent without being lamented. He might exert his parental

authority to dispute a marriage so contracted; whether, when all circumstances were disclosed, the world would approve him for it, he knew not; but he felt that his own heart would condemn him, and that no future aggrandizement to his daughter would be able to blot from his recollection, that he had sacrificed a generous and estimable man, to the cold opinions of a haughty world.

He stood for some time silent, revolving these thoughts in his mind—then stepping up to the agitated pair, he lifted the hand of his daughter off Somerton's shoulder, and with much emotion said—"Since God so strangely united you to this man, Isabella, and your own heart is willing that you should be the reward of his honourable conduct, I will not further oppose your union. Somerton,

ton, your destiny is singular also; the obscurity of your birth and situation, which promised so little of elevation, is now overcome, and as the husband of my daughter, you step at once into affluence and consequence. Take her then, Somerton, from her father, as well as from herself." He placed the soft hand of Isabella in the hard-worn one of Somerton, and as he clasped them together, he raised his eyes to Heaven, and fervently ejaculated—"Bless and protect them, oh God! as thou hast hitherto done!"

Isabella threw the only hand she had at liberty across his neck; tears and joy impeded utterance; she could but articulate—"Oh, father!" and wept in a perfect rapture of delight.

Somerton's face, which had varied from red to pale, while Mr. Amherst had

had spoken, now settled into one deep flush; his lips quivered, and his frame, muscular as it was, trembled beneath the slight burthen of Isabella.

"Be your mother's blessing mingled with your father's, my child!" said Mrs. Amherst, embracing Isabella, yet weeping violently as she did so; "and may you, Somerton, share in it equally!"

Lady Langfield sobbed aloud, and without speaking, took up the certificate of the marriage, which Somerton had, early in this eventful interview, produced, and examined it, as if she were to behold in it some spell of witchcraft.

"If I had words to express myself, I would say them, Mr. Amherst," said Somerton, scarcely able to articulate firmly; "but when I would speak, my heart will not let me. I plighted my pretty Bella an honest faith across the seas—

sons—I will not forswear myself; and to you, Mr. Amherst, I can only promise, that though you may have to blush for me as a gentleman, your eye shall never lower for me as a man."

Mr. Amherst warmly grasped the generous hand that was held out in pledge; and something in the tone or words of Somerton seemed to have softened lady Langfield's displeasure; she advanced to Isabella, and falteringly said—"Let us still be sisters. God grant this union may prove a happy one!"

"None else could have been blessed for me," replied Isabella, fervently, as she mutually embraced lady Langfield —"Oh, Sophia, think of Somerton only as the defender of your sister!"

"If you are what you appear to be," said lady Langfield, turning gently to Somerton,

Somerton, "you will not remember my repugnance to your union with my sister with resentment. We hoped to see her differently allied—she had every title to expect a brilliant lot in matrimony; in worldly honours we are disappointed, but in a good heart, and in all the kind and generous feelings of humanity, our warmest desires for her seem to be accomplished."

"I begin to perceive, more clearly than I did, the difference of our station," replied Somerton. "My pretty Bella, it seems, has got a poor tar, when she should have had a prince. No, madam, I do not now, nor ever will bear you resentment, for regretting the obscure lot that has fallen to your sister: I feel it—yes, yes, my sweet lass, the honest heart of poor Jack is all he has to offer."

He

He stopped abruptly—his countenance changed, and the emotion it betrayed evidently showed that reflection was now beginning to point out to him the whole extent of the difference of condition between Isabella and him.

"Let us drop this subject for to-night," said Mr. Amherst; "to-morrow we shall have the missionary here, and converse upon it at large. Ring for supper, Sophia. Isabella, my dearest child, give over these tears; they unman Somerton, and unnerve us all. Every thing is now understood; the more I consider, the more I am thankful to God, and find I have reason to bless the hour that set Somerton at my board as a son."

The following day, Somerton and Mr. Amherst repaired early to the lodgings

lodgings of the missionary; they found him anxiously expecting the former, and his pallid cheek flushed with real joy, as the happy termination of Somerton's separation from his young bride was related to him.

The countenance of the missionary was, like Somerton's, an index of truth, but it was worn with sickness and care, and his thin feeble figure pained Mr. Amherst to behold. Their conversation was long and of deep interest to them all, for the missionary regarded Somerton with the interest of a father; and readily agreed to accompany him and Mr. Amherst to visit his old acquaintance Isabella.

Isabella had another and affecting pardon to solicit, when she saw the missionary; her heart was sick of falsehood; inge-

ingenuousness was the predominating impulse of her mind, and swerving from that had made her life for the last ten months miserable. She confessed, without reserve, all the feelings which had led her from the generous Somerton, and the agony she had endured, when she passed the missionary in Oxford-street, without recognition. Her heart was heavy, while one shade of concealment remained on its pure texture, and when the last of her ingratitudes were revealed, she turned to Somerton, who sat enraptured beside her, and with a tearful smile, said—"Can you love me still?"

The missionary smiled at Somerton's answer, and said—"Rather ask him, Isabella, what would make him cease to love you?"

Somerton

Somerton listened in amazement, when Mr. Amherst informed him of the large fortune to which Isabella was heiress; it was long before he could be brought to understand, that he, as her husband, had an equal right to it as herself, and heartily exclaimed—"D—— my eyes, if I know what could be done with all that money! Mr. Parson will get a good birth out of it any how; but as to my right to it, I will never be the lubber to hang on any one's pocket, while I have a pair of feet to walk the deck, and a pair of hands to clew the rope. I have plenty of prize-money, and when it is done, I will go to sea for more; my pretty Bella shall never have it to say, that I took rank and fortune both from her."

It required much argument to convince

vince the generous-hearted tar, that it was absolutely indispensible that he should appropriate some part of Isabella's wealth to himself, to enable him to make that appearance which the rank he was now raised to in society could not do without.

On the return of Isabella's two brothers, who were out of town, but hastened their return, on hearing the strange occurrence which had happened at home during their short absence, Isabella and Somerton were remarried, and gave a nine days subject of wonder to the acquaintance of the Amhersts, and even to all who heard of the singular circumstance.

Lord Blaydon would not believe the report, until he heard it corroborated by Mr. Amherst himself; he could not summon

summon courage to see the much talked of bridegroom, nor the lovely bride, whom he had once hoped to call his own; he hurried from town, trusting to absence to obliterate feelings which he now found he had indulged too much for his own peace.

A few weeks afterwards, it was discovered by the merest chance, that the visits of the ruffian Oldham would never more discommode the family of Mr. Amherst—he had attacked a traveller on the highway, for the purpose of robbery, but meeting resistance, a struggle had ensued, in which the villain paid the forfeit of his life for his meditated crime.

Far different was the fate of the good missionary—poverty was banished from his door, and every comfort which wealth

wealth and gratitude could procure, was lavished upon his benevolent head.

All assistance was in vain, however, to renew the missionary's constitution—it was broken beyond the aid of man to renovate—kindness and ease warded off, perhaps for a little time, the closing scene, but it came too early for those who loved him. The ensuing summer, to which his friends had looked so anxiously forward, to recruit his shattered frame, brought no reviving strength to the missionary; he drooped amongst their kindest cares—and hands that would have raised him to life for ever, were at last obliged to lay him on his death-bed.

Somerton watched by him, scarcely breathing, lest he should lose one tone of the kind voice that was faltering into everlasting

lasting-silence; his arm supported the dying head of the missionary; and Isabella, overpowered with sorrow, sat silently on the bed-side, clasping the feeble hand that was already turning cold in hers.

His sister leant over him in agony—some of her tears fell on the face of her brother—he felt them, though on the verge of mortality, and making an effort to raise his closing eyes, faintly uttered —"Weep not, sister; I had need of rest—I go to it in peace—you will have friends."

"Yes, yes," softly exclaimed both Somerton and Isabella.

"Blessed be ye all!" said the missionary, gasping his last. "Blessed be the heart I die on!" His breath fluttered in the last sentence, then calmly died away for ever.

Somerton

Somerton clasped, for an instant, in anguish unutterable, the lifeless body as it lay in his arms; then raising the inanimate head from his breast, he laid it gently on the pillow.

It was his grateful hand also that laid it in the grave; and through every coming year, when at home, Somerton, in sad yet fond remembrance, was often seen to visit the lowly tomb of the once benevolent missionary.

It did not take long to reconcile the Amherst family to the extraordinary match which it had been the destiny of Isabella to form. Somerton had but to be known, to be loved; and his natural good sense, aided by a quick observation, soon enabled him to fill, with ease to himself and pleasure to all others, that

place in society to which he had been so unexpectedly raised.

Yet happy and beloved as he was, he could not be prevailed on to give up his profession; not even to the tears and fond entreaties of Isabella would he yield that—"Do not—do not ask it, my sweet lass," said he to her; "it is my all — my only dependence; you would despise the lubber that would hang idly on the bounty of his wife."

"It is not mine, Somerton," cried Isabella; "if I had wealth, I cared for it only that I might give it to you. I have none—it is yours—I share it but as you please. Stay at home: oh, why should you leave me, when love and fortune are both so wholly yours?"

Somerton folded her in his arms, and implored her not to urge a request which,

which, though he could not grant, yet tortured him to refuse.—" With youth, and health, and strength, could I live in idle dependence at home? would you wish your husband to be sneered at as a lazy poltroon, who eat his bit from his wife's hand? No, my lass; you would blush for the lubber by your side, and I should drop my eye in shame, when a gallant and independent tar passed by. Kiss me, my sweet lass—while Jack Somerton lives, only a brave man shall touch those lips."

Many tears and words were shed and said in vain: Somerton was resolute; and at last finding argument of no avail, Mr. Amherst procured for him the rank of midshipman.

It was in a time of war, and through the interest which Mr. Amherst pos-

sessed, and his own generous and intrepid conduct on all occasions where it was called into action, Somerton was soon noticed by his superiors; and ere peace dismantled so many gallant vessels, had risen to a high command, and shared in several rich prizes, which in part eased his generous heart of the load of being dependent even on Isabella.

Heaven seemed to love to smile on Somerton; he returned safe from many a stormy sea, and hard-fought battle, to the arms of a wife who idolized him, to the caresses of his children, and to the welcomes of friends who loved and esteemed him. Favoured by fortune, respected abroad, and adored at home, such was the happy fate of Somerton; and such ever be the fate of every hand that

that rises to protect the defenceless, and of every heart that beats true to the dictates of honest faith and gallant honour.

END OF THE BRIDE OF OBEYDA.



THE

MATRON AND HER SONS.



THE

MATRON AND HER SONS.

CHAPTER I.

SIR Henry Godfrey's daughter was his only child; her mother was sister to the marquis of Ashburn, and one of the proudest women in England, without sense to guide that pride. The young Charlotte Godfrey was the idol of her mother, and brought up entirely under her tuition. Sir Henry interfered not in the management of his daughter—he was scarcely ever to be found at home—he



was a lover of the turf, of dice, of wine, and all the other predilections of a fashionable free-liver. His death left his daughter, at the age of eight years, the heiress to a splendid fortune, and a large addition to it at the demise of her mother, whose jointure was handsome and liberal.

If nature had endowed Miss Godfrey with any amiable dispositions at her birth, they had never been allowed to expand; early tutored to consider herself as superior to all around, her insolent and supercilious temper made her, even in the nursery, be dreaded and detested. As she advanced in life, her pride equalled, if not exceeded, her mother's, with a bitterness of humour, which the latter had never possessed. Full of her riches and her consequence,

she

she looked down upon every creature who approached her; and was so insufferably arrogant, that not even her wealth could procure her more than bare toleration in society. Friends and intimacies she had none, amongst the independent and sensible part of her acquaintance: some few fawners, with the nature of the dog, to follow those who feed and maltreat it, yet without its fidelity, inured themselves to bear the galling humours of Miss Godfrey; and for a place at her table, and a seat in her carriage, paid a price, that degraded them almost from having the common feelings of humanity.

She was in her twenty-ninth year when her mother died—still single, and without having had an offer but from the needy fortune-hunter: those she

spurned, and proudly waited for the approach of title, birth, and fortune, which alone she would deign to accept. They never came: Miss Godfrey had no beauty, and her behaviour was so offensively haughty, that none but fortune-hunters would pay the penalty of attending on her. This she saw; but instead of endeavouring to make her manners more gentle and conciliating, it added to them sourness and discontent, and rendered her more disagreeable than ever.

At last a young man of noble family, but decayed fortunes, was sacrificed by his mercenary guardians to the wealth of Miss Godfrey.

Algernon Walsingham was born in the lap of prosperity; his family was ancient, and the property immense; but his misguided father lost himself in the

snares

snares of the world, squandered away his happiness and his fortune; and then, unable to witness the ruin he had brought on all who loved and depended on him, finished his existence with a pistol. His widow, distractedly attached to him, scarcely but for her children, could have survived the fatal blow: the estate was mortgaged to nearly its whole value; and, with hardly an independency, Mrs. Walsingham retired with her family from the splendid mansion of their ancestors, and, in the neighbourhood of London, endeavoured on her scanty pittance to educate them.

Algernon, at the period of his father's death, was in his eighteenth year; he was at Oxford, and gave as much satisfaction to his tutors there, as he did to his mother, and to her he was faultless.

His

His estate was so deeply involved, that there was hardly a possibility of himself clearing it during his lifetime; and when he arrived at an age to think of matrimony, his guardians recommended him to pay his addresses to Miss Godfrey, whose fortune would do more than restore to him Dennesvale unencumbered.

To inhabit again the home of his ancestors, was a temptation almost irresistible to Walsingham; but the means? He had seen Miss Godfrey, and how unlike was she to the visions of love, and woman, that had heretofore filled his young fancy!

His principal guardian, who was also his uncle, perceived the hesitation of the youth, and brought forward, as advocates to the cause, the indigent situation

of

of his mother—the dependent state of his sisters—the alleviations which he might be able to make in their now gloomy destinies—the revival of his own birthright splendour, and the renewed enjoyment of that consequence which had once attended the family of Dennevale.

Walsingham listened, in agitated silence, to these glossing arguments of his guardian. He was generous and affectionate; his mother—his sisters—the dearest objects of his care! could he hesitate to draw them from their obscurity, and restore them to that rank which was their due? He flew to his mother, whose advice ever guided him, and laid before her his guardian's views.

To see her son once more in the situation which he was born to fill, was an anticipation

anticipation to make a mother's heart overflow with joy. She knew little of Miss Godfrey; living entirely secluded from the world, she was ignorant of what was passing in its gayer circles; and when her children's uncle might have mentioned Miss Godfrey in their hearing, having an object in view, he had generally accompanied her name with some praise.

Walsingham agreed to his guardian's proposal, and immediately commenced himself a candidate for the favour of Miss Godfrey.

At the time of his introduction to her, he was just of age, and good-tempered, humane, and affable, as Miss Godfrey was the reverse. The lady had remarked him already; although he could not offer her a title, yet his nearest relations, like

like her own, were principally amongst the nobility; and she felt that if she intended to change her single state at all, delay might bring her no more eligible match.

With the haughtiness of a queen, she condescended to receive the addresses of Walsingham, whose pale countenance and heavy heart, when he found himself her accepted lover, betokened none of the rapturous emotions which should attend a time so generally fraught with bliss.

They were married, and Walsingham found himself once more the inhabitant of Dennesvale: his mother visited again the scenes of her former happiness, and wept over the sad memories which they recalled.

Too soon she perceived that she had

come

come to this long-sighed-after and once-delightful home, but to weep and lament more than ever. The temper and arrogance of the younger Mrs. Walsingham were beyond even the mild toleration of the suffering widow and her daughters to endure; they departed from Dennesvale, full of grief and regret for the unfortunate destiny of Walsingham, and returned to their obscure dwelling, as a blessed refuge from the splendid misery of Mrs. Walsingham's supercilious roof.

Walsingham was scarce a husband, when he cursed the gold that had tempted him to sacrifice to its baneful power every happiness and tender feeling of life: home, that sweet word, whose very name even bears a charm, was to him only a place of torment and abhorrence: restless,

restless, miserable, and repentant, he threw himself upon the world, and sought in its follies for solace, or at least forgetfulness.

Mrs. Walsingham made the country round ring with her reproaches and complaints, but without meeting a sympathizing ear or pitying heart; while the excesses of her unhappy husband were generally palliated, if not excused.

In the tenth year of her marriage, Mrs. Walsingham did the only compassionate action that had ever marked her character; she took home the orphan daughter of a relation of her own, who had lived in affluence, but died in poverty.

Catherine Amiral came to Mrs. Walsingham with a heart full of gratitude and sensibility, unwilling to see a fault in

in her benefactress; but the only kindness she was to expect from Mrs. Walsingham was already received; and ere the day of her arrival had passed, she had shrunk from the cold arrogance and stern civility of her supercilious hostess.

Catherine was beautiful and gentle; and while Mr. Walsingham pitied the fate that had led her to suffer the intolerable temper of his wife, she also learned to compassionate his unhappy lot, and to think that he deserved a better destiny than he had found.

An erring sympathy made them dear to each other, and for a transient period a brilliant gleam dispelled the darkness of their former wretchedness. It was a false light, and vanished in distraction. Miss Amiral, young, and until four short months, innocent, was too artless

to

to escape long the detection of Mrs. Walsingham. Her fatal secret was discovered, and dreadful were the consequences.

Mr. Walsingham was from home, and at eleven o'clock at night, in the depth of winter, was the unhappy girl turned from the house, loaded with the most outrageous and degrading epithets; and the servants, who were called up to witness her disgrace, forbidden, under forfeiture of their places, to attend her. Miss Amiral waited for no assistance, but springing from the push that Mrs. Walsingham gave her towards the door, she darted from the house, and was soon lost from view in the dark and midnight gloom.

The heart of the poorest domestic bled for her, and detested the inhumanity

nity of their mistress. Several of them, careless of the threat of being turned off, went in search of her, the moment Mrs. Walsingham retired; but although they spared not fatigue, they could gain no tidings of her that night.

The following morning the unhappy Miss Amiral was found drowned in the river that ran through the grounds. In bearing up the body from the water, the people were met by Mr. Walsingham, who was returning from a short visit, in total ignorance of the dreadful events that had occurred at home during his absence. When he knew whose corpse they were bearing, he fainted dead away; and his servant, with some men from the crowd, took him down from his horse, and laid him on the grass till he recovered.

There

There was every reason to suppose that Miss Amiral had met her death by accident: there was a bridge across the stream, that led to the woodman's house, and it was more than probable that the unfortunate girl had intended to seek shelter there, when, owing to the darkness of the night, and the distraction of her mind, she had missed her way, and perished.

If Mrs. Walsingham felt any remorse, it was never perceivable; on the contrary, with the heart of a savage, she loudly talked of the injuries done herself, and declared that Miss Amiral had committed deliberate suicide; she even went the length of sending peremptory orders to the clergyman to deny the body a consecrated burial-place.

The clergyman, shocked at the message,

sage, justly replied—" That if Miss Amiral had committed suicide, Mrs. Walsingham ought to reflect on the violence which had driven her to that rash act, and endeavour to make her peace with Heaven for her inhumanity, nor further pursue, with unrepentant and sinful wrath, the body, as well as soul, of the unhappy dead."

Mrs. Walsingham interfered no more in the interment, but a living in her gift, which had been laid aside for a son of the clergyman, was immediately promised to another.

Miss Amiral was buried in a remote corner of the churchyard, marked out for strangers, in a nameless grave.

CHAP-

CHAPTER II.

Mr. Walsingham never recovered the shock; his spirits became entirely depressed; and to fly now, more than ever, from all thought, he took, as an only remedy, to the oblivion of intoxication. His friends in vain endeavoured to withdraw him from so dangerous a cure; he told them he could not live and think, and turned deafly from their expostulations. The tear, both of body and mind, was too much for his constitution; he sunk under its effects, and died in the thirty-fourth year of his age. He left a request to his sister, that she would cause

a tombstone to be placed on Miss Amiral's grave; but Mrs. Walsingham found the note, and destroyed it, without mentioning or taking any notice of it.

Mrs. Walsingham had six sons; she never had a daughter: her fortune was wholly at her own disposal, excepting Dennesvale, which went, in hereditary right, to the eldest; but so securely had she arranged her marriage settlements, that the money which had gone to pay off the mortgages on her husband's property, might, if she chose it, be still burthened upon the estate; so that she still retained all her sons dependent upon her will. In them she had the pride of a Roman matron, and looked forward to endless grandeur, in their progress through life, in which they were neither

to

to have heart, nor wish, nor will, but as she chose to direct.

Surrounded by her six blooming sons, and rolling in wealth and luxury, Mrs. Walsingham became so self-elated, that she almost believed the world to be at her beck, and that she was as much above the inroads of disappointment, as she was superior to all around her in prosperity. She looked upon the past only as injuries done to herself, and went on her path of arrogance and presumption. If she could have felt as a mother, she would have been blessed as one. Never were finer young men than the Walsinghams; their birth seemed to be all that they had received from their mother; with the name of Walsingham, they had inherited the noble, generous nature which was inherent in that fa-

mily; and vain were Mrs. Walsingham's endeavours to blight the kindly buds of affection and sympathy that were springing to the best maturity in their youthful bosoms.

The elder Mrs. Walsingham and one of her daughters, were long dead; the remaining daughter was married to a man of property, in the neighbourhood of Dennesvale. Between her and Mrs. Walsingham there was no intercourse whatever, the fault, as wherever she was concerned, on the side of the latter; for Mrs. Calthorpe was an amiable and gentle-tempered woman. She had wished much that her children, and those of her beloved and constantly-lamented brother, should become acquainted, and cement their relationship by an early friendship; but Mrs. Walsingham stern-

ly.

ly prohibited her sons from all companionship with their young cousins; and ever spoke in the most disrespectful and contemptuous terms of Mrs. Calthorpe, whom she unjustly accused of having stirred up anger between her husband and herself.

The Walsinghams had, by stealth however, made up an acquaintance with their cousins; and although they had never so far disobeyed the commands of their mother as to go to their house, Mrs. Calthorpe had frequently met them, and by the tears and soft caresses which she bestowed upon them—endearments which they never knew at home—inspired in their sensible hearts the warmest love for her and for her children.

As they grew up, and went to public schools, the young cousins met with less

restraint, and became attached to each other as brothers.

Mrs. Walsingham did not desire that her sons should be idle, but she wished them to choose professions which they could pursue at home. All agreed with their mother's first wish, but none with her second. The heir was eager to enter the army; of the rest, some were for their elder brother's choice, some for the East Indies; and the youngest, her darling, he would be a sailor.

Mrs. Walsingham gave her violent passions and domineering temper full scope at this first opposition of her sons to her authority. She told them they were beggars but for her, and that beggars they should be, if they did not implicitly obey her commands.

While she was in the heat of her resentment,

sentment, she intercepted a letter to her youngest son, who was then at home during an Eton vacation. It was from one of his cousins; and the rage of Mrs. Walsingham, when she recognised the signature of the hated name of Calthorpe, poured itself in a perfect torrent upon the head of the affrighted boy. She locked him up in a solitary room; and tearing the letter in a thousand pieces, enclosed the fragments in one to Mrs. Calthorpe, full of insolent invective. That whole day and night she kept the little culprit prisoner; and next morning, when he sent an humble message to her by his brothers through the keyhole, "requesting her to forgive him, and promising never to offend in the same manner again, and begging she would let him out," she replied that he

should stay there until he knew the duty and obedience of a son; and indignantly ordered the young men from her presence who had ventured to intercede for their brother.

The following morning the young captive was nowhere to be found; he had escaped by means of the sheets, which were suspended from the window, torn, and knotted together.

During a fortnight his family were in the tortures of suspense to know what had become of him, when a letter was received by his mother from himself, dated on board the Severn ship of war, asking her forgiveness, and informing her that he had entered the navy, and was to sail for the Mediterranean the next day.

Mrs. Walsingham was thankful to have

have her fears for his safety relieved in any way; but his flight doubled her hatred to the Calthorpes, as the cause of it; and the detested name was forbidden henceforward to be uttered in her presence.

It might not be uttered, but it was often thought of: the second eldest Walsingham was deeply attached to his cousin, Maria Calthorpe; she was amiable, well born, and independent; and it was hard that the unjustifiable prejudice of Mrs. Walsingham should debar her son from a union that promised every appearance of worldly happiness.

Cyril had been keen for the army; but he was willing to give up that desire, if his mother would allow him to marry Maria, and turn to any home pro-

fession which she should choose to select.

Long did he hesitate to reveal his passion, and long anxiously watch to observe a relenting symptom in his mother; she was stern ever; and at last the young lover, unable to endure longer suspense, yet afraid to divulge the matter himself, prevailed on his elder brother to disclose his attachment to his mother, and endeavour to gain her consent to his union with Maria Calthorpe.

Mrs. Walsingham's blood nearly froze at the audacious request; then boiling in all its mighty fury, she sunk on her knees, and vowed to God, that she would rather see Cyril on his bier, than united to one of the accursed race of Calthorpe.

Algernon retired in dismay from the violent

violent refusal of his mother: but Cyril was an ardent lover, and since the matter was once broached, he stood firmly, though respectfully, up for his attachment, and implored his mother to conquer a prejudice that all good affections were against, nor sacrifice, to a false resentment, the whole happiness of her son.

Mrs. Walsingham was inexorable; and in one of her moments of ungovernable rage, wrote to a relation, high in power, to procure an immediate commission for her second son, in some regiment abroad.

Her request was instantly attended to; and the first intimation which Cyril had of it, was to see his name gazetted to an ensigncy in a regiment in the West Indies.

Mrs. Walsingham, in her passion, had not thought of that destination; it staggered her, but she had been braved by one she intended should tremble to disobey her; and resolute to shew her power, and her perpetual hatred to the cause of his offence, she haughtily declared to her son, that he should either resign Maria, or depart instantly to join his regiment.

Cyril was true to Maria; and finding all hope in vain, prepared to leave Britain. On the day he left home, he made another fruitless attempt to soften his mother, and to delay, at least for some time longer, his departure to a climate which he dreaded.

"Will you give up Maria then?" demanded Mrs. Walsingham, sternly, and

and without a tear, although her son was on his knees in anguish before her.

"Never——I cannot," faltered Cyril.

"Then go, sir," said his mother; and turning to a gentleman who was to travel to London with Cyril, she added, loftily—"Take that young man away; he has nothing further to do here."

His brothers hid their faces, while Cyril, catching at the door as his friend was leading him out, clung to it, and wildly exclaimed—"Oh, mother, do not let me go!"

Mrs. Walsingham's lip slightly quivered—"Give up Maria."

"Farewell, mother!—Oh, mother, it is for ever!"

Cyril's voice sunk in emotion as he uttered this agonized adieu: his friend removed the now-unresisting hand from

its

its hold of the door, and led him down stairs. His brothers rushed after him, and Mrs. Walsingham went to the window, where she got her last look of Cyril, as the chaise drove him away.

CHAPTER III.

THE hurry of Cyril's departure had scarcely subsided, when accounts arrived, that the ship in which the younger Walsingham had sailed, had gone down in a heavy gale off the coast of Algiers; and Mrs. Walsingham's little midshipman found there a watery grave, along with the rest of the gallant crew.

In the bitter anguish of her grief, Mrs. Walsingham prayed that Mrs. Calthorpe might go down to the tomb childless, since it was to the knowledge of her family that she attributed the loss of her son; but this heavy dispensation alleviated

alleviated none of the rigour and haughty authority which she exercised over the rest of the sons she had with her.

While they were boys, they yielded to the rigid sway; but as they advanced into manhood, obedience, such as their mother required, became more difficult; and hearts that would have delighted in home, were driven from it with fear and disgust; until at last, careless of the independence that was promised to them at the price of their bondage to a temper that knew no softened minute from stern authority and domineering arrogance, the three younger Walsinghams applied of themselves for employment suitable to their inclinations: one of them went out a cadet to India, and the other two to the wars in Spain, under sir Arthur Wellesley.

Mrs.

Mrs. Walsingham would hardly be prevailed on to see them after their appointments; and when she did, it was to load them with reproaches, and to assure them that her fortune should never in any part descend to them. Pride supported her through her parting with them, as if she scorned to hold a feeling in common with humanity, or to shew even to her children that she was dependent for one comfort, on those whom she had ever made feel were but the creatures of her bounty and her will. She had now only her eldest son at home, and the absence of the others did seem to incline her to abate a little of the thraldom in which she had hitherto held him.

Another heavy blow shortly after fell upon her haughty head. The first tidings

tidings of Cyril from Jamaica brought accounts of his death; he had been carried off, by the fever prevalent in that climate, four days after landing.

Mrs. Walsingham took to her bed when this sad intelligence was communicated to her; and the last pleading look of Cyril, as he clung to her dressing-room door, came with avenging memory to her recollection; but as she recovered, she ceased to blame herself, and said—"Had the Calthorpes never existed, my two boys had been in life! curse them with me, Algernon, that their parents may be the last of the name upon earth!"

The colour receded from her son's cheek at the horrible prayer, and in a voice of terror, he exclaimed—"Mother, curse not, lest a curse fall on yourself!"

Mrs.

Mrs. Walsingham, irritated that any one should dare to offer her a reproof, ordered him indignantly from her presence; and again in cold severity, seemed to bid defiance to grief and regret.

She sought out a splendid alliance for Algernon; rank was her idol, and in uniting him to a daughter of the duke of Stafford's, she fancied that with the combined interest of both families, a title might eventually be procured for him. She thought she had only to command, and be obeyed; when the young man declared that he had already placed his affections on the daughter of general Amiral.

This acknowledgment threw Mrs. Walsingham into a perfect frenzy. General Amiral was a near relative of that unfortunate girl, who had once found a

short

short home at Dennesvale, and then a long rest in its churchyard.

In the first torrent of her rage, she poured the appalling story full upon the ears of her astonished son, who, until then, had been in total ignorance of the circumstance. The dreadful disclosure urged him to inquire deeper into the affair; he learned sufficient to make pity mingle with condemnation, and to feel that the mother he possessed had not one claim on his regard, save what arose from her having given him birth.

Mrs. Walsingham expected that her son would instantly disdain all further intercourse with a family so degraded in one of its dear members; but Algernon, aware now of the character of his mother, and arrived at an age to judge for himself, would not longer submit to the thraldom

thraldom she had exercised over him, and still wished to continue.

He refused his consent to the marriage which his mother had proposed to him, and firmly declared his unalterable affection for Miss Amiral, whose birth was equal to his own, and whose charms and virtues were the theme of every tongue that knew her.

Mrs. Walsingham's denial was like a frenzy, as she told him—" That she would rather help to lay him in Cyril's grave, than consent to his marriage with Julia Amiral."

Walsingham, most faithfully attached, tried every method in his power to induce his mother to consent to his union with Miss Amiral; and failing in his best endeavours, he sought the interest

of

of some of his particular friends, to intercede with his mother in his behalf.

They did not hesitate to speak for a young man, from whom happiness seemed so unjustly withheld, and mentioned Miss Amiral as one whom nature had endowed with every quality to rivet love, and ensure esteem.

Their interference exasperated the angry passions of Mrs. Walsingham to downright fury; and when she next saw her son, she said to him, livid from excess of resentment—"Algernon, if I refused your solicitations, thought you I would condescend to yield to those of others? Ungrateful boy! are you not the creature of my bounty? Can I not throw you as destitute on the world as was your father, when I first restored him to affluence? And yet you dare

brave

brave me—dare wish to unite yourself to the near relation of that worthless wretch, whom my ill-placed generosity sheltered from poverty, that she might turn and sting her benefactress! Have I not been outraged enough already by the accursed name of Amiral? And do you, fool, think that I will let my wealth go to support further one of that impure race?" Overpowering passions here interrupted her; her breath came and went by snatches; and the words she would have uttered refused, in the conflict, to bear articulate sounds.

Walsingham took advantage of her involuntary silence, and replied, himself considerably agitated—" If the slight to my father's memory were not offered by his widow, and my mother, I should not, as I now do, suffer it to pass unrepelled.

repelled. Errors, not his own, reduced my father's once-splendid fortune; but poor as he fell, it was never to destitution. For Miss Amiral I cannot stand thus passive; her worth and purity are too well known to admit an imputation to the contrary. Long and far might be sought, and never found, that race which has not some staining blot on its fame; if that unhappy woman, whose name you have called up from the grave, sunk beneath the frailty of mortality, her short period of error, and the fatal misery of its close, might well wash out the indiscretion which obscured her youthful virtue. But if charity should still be cold to her memory, we at least, mother, ought to be silent in the accusing reproach, since that unhappy Miss Amiral was not more closely connected

nected to the family of general Amiral than she was to our own."

Mrs. Walsingham gasped for breath —"Have I born children to be thus reviled! Surely God decreed them rebels and ingrates from the first! Have I spent my days and nights in planning for their good, and is this my reward, to be deserted, and set at defiance by them all? Algernon, marry Julia Amiral! Marry her and starve! and may she prove to you what your father found her namesake to be!—Down with your hand!—touch me not!—you are an alien from my blood! and here, on this book," taking up a bible as she spoke, "I swear, by every sacred word it contains, that I will so utterly curse you, from the hour of your marriage with Julia Amiral, that nothing good can ever light upon

you; and at my death I will prefer dogs for my heirs before your children."

Algernon grew pale at the horrible violence of his mother; for a moment he was incapable of speaking; then, in low, despairing accents, said—"Unhappy woman! you may live to have only those heirs to your wealth. I will not marry Julia—I will not load a mother's soul with so grievous a crime, as I know you too well to doubt that you would lay upon it. I will save you from imprecating those curses which would fall mutually on us both. One son is already in his grave, who might now have been a happy husband, and the grateful attendant on a mother, who had given him to the arms of domestic bliss. I—I, mother, had such a prospect; neither of us made a degrading choice; the women

we

we loved were equal to ourselves; but you have let prejudice and temper destroy the natural feelings of affection, and your sons—your sons," and he vehemently struck his breast, "must be the victims! Mother, I will not stay in England without Julia Amiral; I will follow the fortunes of my brothers in Spain, and seek in their toils to forget all I might once have enjoyed."

His heart was bursting as he spoke; every tender feeling was stirred up to distract him; he could no longer combat against the crush of all his best hopes, and rushing from his mother, he fled to his own apartment, to hide there the anguish which the fortitude of man could not control.

Mrs. Walsingham was much struck with her son's words, and sent one of his

friends to entreat him to remain at home, promising to give him Dennesvale unincumbered, if he would abjure all further thought of Miss Amiral.

"Home!" cried the agitated Walsingham, "what home! I never knew a home! The only home this world held out to my view, was in the arms of Julia Amiral. I am driven thence, and nowhere else will I rest but in the lap of my kinder mother—earth."

No agreement could be entered into between Algernon and Mrs. Walsingham; with so fatal a warning in her recollection as Cyril's fate, she still persisted in her rejection of the good and the beautiful Julia Amiral; and saw, in stern resolution, her last son leave her in sorrow and despair.

CHAP.

CHAPTER IV.

THE time was now approaching when Mrs. Walsingham was to be taught the lot of mortality, and to drink to the last dregs the cup of human affliction, which wealth and pride must taste alike with the poorest and the humblest of the earth.

Like the unfortunate Cyril, the heir of Dennesvale left his home but to die; he fell in the battle of Barossa: and in a few subsequent months, the other two Walsinghams were killed at Albuera—an awful lesson of the uncertainty of life, and the vanity of trusting to mortal

hopes and prosperity, as Mrs. Walsingham had so presumptuously done.

For the first time in her existence, Mrs. Walsingham excited sympathy in those who knew her; and when two years afterwards her last remaining son was drowned, in returning to her from India, they shrunk in awe, as if a judgment on arrogance had been purposely hurled down on the proud, and once-sinfully-confident head of Mrs. Walsingham.

Mrs. Calthorpe returned from Madeira, whither she had accompanied her husband, on account of his health, shortly after Mrs. Walsingham had received the intelligence of her last son's death. All the injuries which she had borne from that haughty woman faded from her breast, as she wept the fate of her young

young nephews, and commiserated the grief of their mother. She forgot that twenty-four years had elapsed since she had entered the gates of Dennesvale; and feeling only the sympathy of a relation, and the charity of a Christian, she hastened to mourn with the afflicted, and to offer consolation to the broken-hearted.

She found the bereaved matron alone, seated in statue-like stillness, with a tearless eye, and features fixed in stern and rigid despair. The words died on Mrs. Calthorpe's lips, as she entered this abode of dreary sorrow. She sunk on the nearest seat, and burst into tears of hysterical agony.

Mrs. Walsingham started from her chair; the marble paleness of her cheek gave way to a quick flush of crimson; her

her eye brightened again with its usual scorn, and drawing up her tall erect figure to its greatest height, she stepped down the room, to where Mrs. Calthorpe sat speechless, and standing direct before her, said—" Madam, you see the object of your curiosity. I did not expect such an outrage to be committed, as that the murderess of two of my sons would dare to force herself into my presence! You triumph, madam, in the downfall of my prosperity, and behold the curses which I prayed on your family fall on my own. Woman, look at me well, that no object of your errand may be ungratified. Did you think I had lost the stamp of human form, as I had the ties of human life, that you must come to gaze at me, and thrust your hateful presence on my sight?

sight? Came you to shriek in my ear, 'Where are your sons?' Hence, woman! your triumph is in vain! They once were, and in their memory I still rise proudly over you all!"

Her whole frame, as she spoke, seemed to elate with pride, disdain, and wrath; her voice grew firmer and sterner at every succeeding word; and as she concluded, she haughtily waved her hand to the door, and then stalked with a stately pace from the apartment.

Mrs. Calthorpe sunk fainting from her chair; a servant found her motionless on the floor; and in successive fits she was carried home, where for weeks she lay dangerously ill of the shock which Mrs. Walsingham's conduct had occasioned her.

Mrs.

Mrs. Walsingham had neither friend, adviser, nor confidant; in prosperity she had gone through the world, careless of all its tender sympathies, and now, in sorrow, she equally despised its consolations.

Dennesvale was no longer hers to inhabit; but she left her own superb mansion, and went to dwell in a small house near to the churchyard that contained the burial-place of the Walsinghams. The long-neglected request of her husband was at last acceded to by herself, and a stone laid over the obscure grave of the unhappy Miss Amiral. In his own tomb she caused a new slab to be placed, with the following inscription:—

ERECTED

ERECTED
by Dame CHARLOTTE WALSINGHAM,
to the Memory of her husband,
who lieth interred here;
and in remembrance
of her six gallant sons,
who rest in distant lands
and foreign seas.

1815.

Pray for the soul
of the widow and the mother.

Mrs. Walsingham retired from all acquaintance with the world; she laid down her equipage and attendants, and put aside every appearance of rank, as if she had imposed upon herself that mortification of her dearest propensities.

She paid a daily visit to the tomb of her husband, and with folded hands and fixed

fixed eyes, stood gazing on the sad inscription. But none ever heard her complain, nor, in her most solitary moments, beheld a tear on her cheek. Cold, and stern, and stately, she passed to and from the churchyard, nor was a muscle of her face ever seen to move from its rigid gravity, unless a dog would cross her path—then only a slight contortion, as of suppressed pain, was visible, and with a quicker pace she would hurry on, as if from some repelling sight.

Lonely as was her life, so was her death; she was found dead before the railings of her husband's tomb, and her wealth went to a distant relation, who held a feast in joy that she was no more.

END OF VOL. I.

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BRIDE OF OBEYDA,

AND OTHER TALES.

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THE

BRIDE OF OBEYDA;

And other Tales.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

MONTVILLE, OR THE DARK HEIR OF THE CASTLE.

VOL. II.

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1827.



ONE-EYED BEAUTY.

ONE-EYED BEAUTY.

IN the beautiful gardens of Kensington, a party of young persons were one day walking, enjoying all that happy hilarity which youth and gaiety seldom fail to create. In the midst of their amusement, a stone suddenly hit one of the ladies in the eye. A shriek of pain turned their mirth into alarm; and while some anxiously surrounded the half-fainting sufferer, others hastily proceeded to search after the perpetrators of so wanton an outrage.

The mischief was committed by two

little boys at play with each other, and their rapid flight saved them from the chastisement which they deserved.

Meanwhile Amanda Yorke was borne to her carriage; and, unable to bear the light, was conveyed home to her mother, whom she had left, not an hour before, in all the splendour of health and beauty.

Amongst her companions on that fatal day, none more bitterly regretted the accident than two young men, who were each deeply enamoured with Amanda.

Riversdale was an officer in the guards, and that handsome, seducing sort of fellow, who can steal a woman's heart, whether she will or not. He was young, and full of animation, danced to admiration, and in gallantry had the tongue of eloquence itself. Ormond, his cousin and rival, had none of Riversdale's

gay

gay and dashing graces; he was a man of elegant figure and address, but too grave for a ball-room, and too sensible for flirtation; the ladies allowed he was to be admired, but still their praise always ended with an—"Ah! but Riversdale!"

Riversdale knew all this; and it was only the irresistible loveliness of Amanda Yorke which had brought his truant heart into a bondage which all his vanity and self-esteem could not overcome.

Amanda was the only child of a widowed mother; nature had given her a most enchanting person, and happily, unlike most beauties, her heart was as lovely as her face. She was blessed with a mother superior to most of her sex; and under her watchful care, had sprung up to womanhood as near to an angel as mortality can approach.

To this young beauty both the sedate

Ormond and the volatile Riversdale had yielded their hearts; and neither attempted to conceal his desire of gaining her hand.

Mrs. Yorke offered no opposition to their attentions; she might have had a preference, but she was satisfied that her daughter's choice should fall on either of them: both were men of fortune; Ormond stood high in public estimation, and Riversdale, although he entered more deeply into the reigning follies of the day, was neither a libertine nor a gambler.

Amanda, sensible and observant, did not fail soon to discover the superior abilities of Ormond, and gave that admiration to his talents and manners which no discerning mind could deny. In talking with Ormond, time flew delightfully away: but when Riversdale approached, her attention became distract-

ed—

ed—her eyes involuntarily wandered to those brilliant glances, which were so tenderly bent upon her; one pleading look drew her away to Riversdale, and made her his willing captive through the remainder of the evening. She danced with him, or rather flew along, guided by his light graceful figure; and at the end of the dance, while his gentle hand fanned her, listened to vows and protestations, that made her heart beat and her cheek blush. Amanda had not yet absolutely plighted herself to Riversdale, but a voice in the depth of her heart whispered—"I will marry *him*;" and a sigh as she so decided rose to the disappointment of the amiable Ormond.

He, in an interview which he had with Mrs. Yorke, on the subject of his attachment to her daughter, expressed his apprehension that Amanda's affections were captivated by the gay fasci-

nations of his rival, and dejectedly added—" I will, at all events, offer myself to-morrow to Miss Yorke: she cannot have misunderstood the devoted ardour with which I have endeavoured to interest her favour in my own behalf. However painful her rejection may be to my feelings, she shall never have it to imagine that my attentions were false, or tendered without the dear aim of gaining her hand."

Ormond spoke thus to Mrs. Yorke the morning of the day of the fatal walk in Kensington-gardens; and that to-morrow, which one of her lovers anticipated with so many fears, and such doubting hope, saw Amanda stretched on the bed of pain, her face swollen and disfigured, and the consciousness of life, as well as love, almost gone.

The quick, uncontrolled feelings of Riversdale nearly put him distracted;

twenty times a-day he was at Mrs. Yorke's door, to inquire after Amanda, and every hour his valet was dispatched to bring him tidings of the adored invalid.

While Riversdale could not command himself sufficiently to talk one rational sentence to Mrs. Yorke, Ormond, in the absence of her only brother, acted that brother's part, and almost constantly at her house, shewed the real passion which he felt for Amanda, in his assisting attentions to her mother, who, agonized with affliction and alarm, frequently lost all fortitude, and would have sunk beneath the danger which threatened her daughter, had it not been for the sensible exhortations, yet most tender sympathy, of the faithful Ormond.

At last, after weeks of suffering, Amanda rose from her bed convalescent, but no longer to shine the star of beauty

which she had formerly done: the injured eye was irrecoverably lost; and a green patch hid what once had shone a very sun of hazel lustre.

"Will Riversdale love me still?" said Amanda, as for the first time since the accident, she looked at herself in a mirror. "Will Riversdale's passion survive the loss of beauty?" She shuddered, and turned from the mirror, to shed a flood of anguished tears.

Riversdale could scarcely believe it possible that Amanda had lost her eye.

Ormond was present when Mrs. Yorke broke the fatal intelligence to him; and his sad and mortified look confirmed what the young lover was so backward and horrified to believe.

"Have you seen her, Ormond?" demanded he, with an agitated voice.

"No," replied Ormond, dejectedly, "I have not yet seen her."

"None

"None as yet have," said Mrs. Yorke, "except her medical attendants; but as her health is fast returning, I wish her no longer to be secluded, but to begin to mingle again amongst her friends. She will feel at first her deplorable loss, although, I trust, her mind is endowed with strength sufficient to bear with resignation the disfigurement of that beauty which eventually a few years would have faded."

Riversdale almost groaned aloud; and Ormond for a moment pressed his hand on his eyes.

"Your sympathy, gentlemen, is truly grateful," continued Mrs. Yorke. "Amanda is young, and it may take some time to reconcile her to a change so mortifying; but I trust her happiness was not set on so unstable a foundation as personal charms. Her mind ——"

"Is there no chance—no possibility of her eye being restored?" interrupted Riversdale, in a fever of contending emotions. "Surely some physician might succeed! All in the world should be tried."

"Can you suppose that all that medical skill could do has not been resorted to?" replied Mrs. Yorke. "Do not, I beseech you, mislead Amanda with hopes that could only end in disappointment, and add to that regret which it must now be the aim of her friends to banish from her mind!"

"Her felicity will be their sole desire," said Ormond, in a low energetic voice; while Riversdale, overpowered, struck his forehead, exclaiming—"Oh God!"

"As friends," said Mrs. Yorke, hesitatingly, "I would ask you to come and drink tea with Amanda this evening. She

She is not less sensible than I am of the unremitting attentions which both of you have bestowed on her illness. The alteration in her appearance must also change the motives which might have formerly induced you to visit at this house. Amanda wishes you to understand, gentlemen, that the past is entirely forgotten, nor any other sentiment expected on your parts but friendship. My daughter's ideas on that subject are mine likewise; but we do not mean to lose you as friends. Will you come in that light this evening?"

Both gentlemen bowed assent, in a silence that knew not how to speak.

"It is an early visit," added Mrs. Yorke; "but your attentions to my daughter and me have been so kind and unremitting, that I wished we should early understand each other, and begin to be friends. Excuse me now, gentlemen—

men—I must go and prepare my poor invalid for your appearance; she did not know, when I left her to come down to you, that I was to invite you so soon."

Amanda did indeed require preparation; she accused her mother of cruelty in thus hurrying her to an interview that she felt would be next to death. As the evening approached, her agitation increased, almost beyond the power of her weak frame to sustain; and when the steps of the gentlemen were heard ascending the stairs, it was with difficulty she was kept from fainting.

As they entered, Amanda's first impulse was to hide her face.—"Let me be the first to congratulate you on your recovery, Miss Yorke," said Ormond, in animated accents, as he hastened to where she sat. "I can only say, I thank God that I am once more in your presence."

There was a tone of sincere feeling in Ormond's voice, that soothed the sinking Amanda; she listened in vain to hear another voice; and as she half raised her head to reply to Ormond, she perceived Riversdale standing at the end of the sofa, with his eyes fixed intently on her; his cheek was changing, and a mingled expression of dread and despair was in his look. As Amanda timidly turned to him, he seemed to start into recollection, and hurriedly advancing to her, attempted to utter a congratulation; but his memory appeared to be lost in the conflict of his mind, and the words he would have spoken, were so unconnected and confused, that none could understand what he meant to say.

Amanda's head drooped again; and Mrs. Yorke, anxious to relieve them both, rung immediately for tea.

Ormond, ever sensible and unmindful

of

of self, began a conversation that might include the whole company. Amanda could scarcely be said to join in it: Riversdale made an effort; but his gaiety was fled, and he sunk into an absence of manner remarkable by all, and nearly torturing to the poor invalid.

"Riversdale loves me no longer!" cried Amanda, the moment the gentlemen had departed. "Ah, mother, did you not observe him? he could not dissemble his horror at my altered appearance. I shall shock all who ever loved me, and become an object of hatred and disgust!"

Her mother embraced her, and tried to sooth her grief.—"Did you not tell me, my child, that your heart was not altogether devoted to Riversdale?"

"Not so entirely as to make me die of sorrow at losing him," replied Amanda;

da; "but it was too much his not to feel nearly breaking at his desertion."

"You can only fancy that, my child."

"No, no, mother: I read it in his eyes the first moment I met them; they seemed to say—'Poor hideous Amanda, who could love you now!"

"But Ormond's spoke differently," said Mrs. Yorke.

"Ormond can only better dissemble," replied Amanda, mournfully.

"Or puts less value on personal appearance," gently interrupted Mrs. Yorke.

"No, mother, no! I am hideous in every eye. If Riversdale forsake me, none else will prove true!"

"That is making Riversdale a standard indeed," rejoined Mrs. Yorke: "time may prove to you the fallibility of your judgment."

Riversdale went home with Ormond from

from Mrs. Yorke's; and throwing himself into a chair, laid his head upon the table in utter silence.

Ormond himself was in a reflective mood; but after two or three musing turns across the room, he stopped beside Riversdale, and touching his shoulder, said—"Riversdale, what are you dreaming of?"

"Of what once was Amanda Yorke," answered Riversdale, slowly, and raising his head.

"Is she so changed then?" demanded Ormond.

"Changed!" repeated Riversdale; "I looked for the angel I had worshipped—oh horrible!" and he struck his forehead vehemently.

Ormond paused for a few moments, then hesitatingly said—"Mrs. Yorke was generous to-day, in saving us the awkwardness of retreating, after we had advanced

advanced so far. How do you feel——"

"Like a hell," interrupted Riversdale, abruptly; "my thoughts are one complete anarchy. Do you draw back, Ormond?"

"Draw back!—no! I would marry Amanda Yorke to-morrow, and think it the most blessed day of my life."

"What, with that horrible patch?" cried Riversdale, in a tone between jealousy and amazement.

"Yes, as it cannot be dispensed with," replied Ormond, smiling: "the alteration in Amanda's appearance will not chill one sentiment of my affection for her."

"But what is a woman without beauty!" said Riversdale, with a deep sigh.

"Perhaps nothing to you," answered Ormond; "but I have been seeking for a heart to love, as well as a face to admire,

mire, and Amanda has that heart, if I could be so fortunate as to win it."

"Alas! the heart is never seen," said Riversdale, despondingly.

"But it is felt every hour—every moment of our existence!" rejoined Ormond, impressively. "You, Riversdale, are a fashionable fellow, and place your happiness on the splendid deceits of the world: I, on the contrary, am rather hermitically inclined, and ardent in the search of the real joys of domestic life: if my lot should be blended with that of a woman whose mind and education were suitable to my own, our fireside should be my world. If my wife had a faithful smile for me there, and a kind heart in my concerns, she would, through all changes, ever be dear and lovely to me."

"A life such as that would kill me in a fortnight," said Riversdale: "I must

must live—not vegetate. My wife must sparkle like her diamonds. Oh, what bliss! what rapture did I not look forward to, when Amanda should be mine! Was there ever a more enchanting girl? or a man's eye that beheld her, that did not idolize her beauty? and yet, Ormond, you say it was her heart alone that attracted you. Oh, hypocrite!"

"I did not say so," replied Ormond: "I loved and still love her heart, but it was her beauty that first drew my admiration; and finding, upon a further acquaintance, that she had a mind worthy of that angelic face, I made her the object of an attachment that no personal change could alter."

"Then you would marry Amanda!" said Riversdale, struggling with disappointment and regret. "Oh heavens, what demon guided that accursed stone!

and

and yet you say her beauty had no attraction for you, Ormond?"

"Ask first if I am a man, before you put that question again," replied Ormond: "yet is one blemish to obscure and destroy a thousand charms?"

"Oh, that d——d patch!" cried Riversdale, starting distractedly across the room: "that d——d, d——d patch!"

Amanda, by degrees, began to see company at home; but she could not be prevailed on to go to parties abroad. It was wormwood to the already-tortured feelings of Riversdale, to be obliged to listen to the remarks, exclamations, and laments, that every where assailed him, on the disfigurement of Amanda's once-lovely face. His love for her, however, was not so easily to be vanquished; and a feeling of honour in withdrawing addresses, even though she herself had entirely

tirely absolved him of all reproach, once so ardently tendered, kept him, who had not a bad heart, in a state of mind that totally bereft him of his quiet.

He still visited moderately at Mrs. Yorke's, but then, before the fatal accident, scarce an hour of the day came on that did not find him the devoted attendant on Amanda. She perceived the vacillancy of his thoughts, and sensible of the little reliance that was to be placed on a love which had only beauty for the safeguard of its permanence, she exerted herself to withdraw her partiality for a vain inconstant, and bestow it on one whom reason, truth, and stedfast attachment, all combined to render worthy of the most tender gratitude.

Ormond waited until Amanda was in the drawing-room again, from her invalid seclusion, before he made his proposals; and then, in that plain and candid language

guage which ever marks true love, offered her his hand and his heart.

Amanda was not proof against this sincere passion. She burst into an immediate flood of tears, and faltered amidst them.—"Ormond, can you really love one so disfigured? or is it a mistaken sense of honour from former attentions that prompts this declaration?"

"Ask your mother, Amanda," said Ormond, tenderly; "she will convince you, if my honest professions fail, that love, as from the first hour of our acquaintance, alone prompted me to seek this to me anxiously-desired interview. Be but your heart mine, and let every outward beauty change, I will now and ever think myself the most fortunate of men."

"Thou most generous one!" said Amanda, with much emotion, "to chain you to such an object as I, would be

be an ungrateful return to so much disinterestedness. I can mix no more in the world—I could not carry this disfigured face amongst the gay circles in which you are accustomed to move—I should shrink from the ridicule which my appearance would create, and you —you, Ormond, would blush for your wife."

"Be only mine," said Ormond, his eyes beaming with fond and serious truth—"be only mine, and where you live shall be your own choice. I will go with you to court or to a cottage; in a crowd, or in solitude, you will be equally the pride and delight of my existence; while I have life, no shaft of sorrow shall ever touch you, that my care and affection can avert."

To hear Ormond speak thus, and to believe that he offered a faith as sincere as it was tender, gave to the before-

doubting and troubled heart of Amanda a sensation of joy amounting to rapture; a torrent of tears gushed down her burning cheeks, and sobs of happiness choked her attempts at utterance.

"Dear Amanda, is this hand to be mine?" said Ormond, in a tender, anxious voice, and pressing it to his palpitating heart.

Amanda struggled to speak.—"Keep it, Ormond; and may God grant, along with it, every power to make you happy!"

Ormond caught her in ecstacy to his breast; and those first moments of plighted affection seemed to foretell, in their rapturous emotion, the blessed destiny that awaited truth, and gratitude, and love.

When hearts understand each other, and fortune is propitious, what need of delay, and losing happy days in idle ceremony?

remony? So argued Ormond, as he sat that evening with Amanda and her mother. Mrs. Yorke was too happy in the prospect of the son-in-law whom she had ever wished, to offer any unnecessary objections; and the fair cause of the discussion felt her voice falter, and her heart accuse her, when she would attempt to retard the so-earnestly-pleaded-for completion of the happiness of a lover so faithful and true as Ormond.

The evening passed in delight to all; and when Ormond forced himself to say a reluctant good-night, he went in the rapturous anticipation of being the husband of Amanda that day two months.

About a fortnight afterwards, one morning, while Ormond was sitting at breakfast, Riversdale entered the room, equipped in a travelling dress.—"Ormond," cried he, "I have argued with myself in vain; that infernal patch over-

comes what I know to be reason, sense, and justice; my cursed folly prevails, and I leave Amanda Yorke, the only woman I could ever love. I am off for Paris this hour, to try to forget her, in scenes where, I know, amongst the fairest of them all, that lovely ruined face will for ever gaze at me, in the memory of swerved and faithless vows."

"In memory then only let it be," said Ormond, smiling: "I have good reasons to wish you to succeed in forgetting Amanda Yorke: let not that unfortunate patch disturb your peace any more; on the face of my wife, I trust, it shall cease to annoy you."

"Your wife!" repeated Riversdale quickly, flinging down his cap; "what, Ormond, do you mean?"

"Simply what I have said," replied Ormond. "Amanda has consented to be mine; our marriage takes place in little

little more than a month; and I hope to be holding my honeymoon in the domestic bliss of home, while you are dashing away a *milor* on the continent."

"Have I then lost her for ever?" said Riversdale, his colour receding. "Ormond, are you in earnest? the world—"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Ormond, with gay energy; "what is the world when put in competition with the peace of a man's mind and affections? Was I to leave my heart lonely, and my home solitary, because my mistress had a patch on her eye! I bless the accident; had it been otherwise, I might have sued in vain."

"Ormond, you are inhuman," cried Riversdale, in a voice of unsuppressed anguish; "you know I adored her, and you triumph in my misery!"

"No, Riversdale," returned Ormond, more seriously; "you injure me by so ungenerous and unjust an accusation

I triumph only in being the accepted lover of Amanda: to give pain voluntarily to another, is as foreign to my disposition as it was at this moment to my wish. You adored Amanda, but it was for her beauty alone; and, enraptured by it, you poured into her ear those sweet flatteries, and devoted to her those tender attentions, which are so seductive to the young and inexperienced heart of man as well as woman. When those charms were next to destroyed, which you had so enthusiastically worshipped, you found the insecure basis of your love; and that, instead of the unchangeable attachment which you had fancied you possessed, it was but a mere passion of the senses, wholly dependent on beauty for its existence. You loved no more, and were left at liberty to retreat, as if you had never advanced. I, on the contrary, felt the same affection

as

as ever; the charms of the face I admired were surely injured, but those of the mind I loved, were untouched; and removed from the influence of more gallant attentions, I tried how the faithful attachment of a man would succeed, told in the plain and unadorned language of honest tenderness. I have told you its success, and perhaps, in the joy of my heart, I might mention it in unthinking terms of gaiety: if I did so to hurt you, Riversdale, pardon me—it was never meant so. You have been so long evidently off——"

"True, yes—the madman showed himself at once," hastily interrupted Riversdale, in a voice scarcely articulate, through the contending emotions that warred in his breast. "Ormond, I feel a very hell! I regret her to madness; and yet, such is the folly I despise but cannot conquer, that were she free again to

bestow on me that hand which I once thought Paradise would be a desert without, I would fly, oh God! as I do now. Yet still I could not witness your union —I must hurry, faster than ever, to some clime that has never heard the name of Amanda." He paused for a moment, in overpowered silence, then rapidly uttered—"I shall go distracted if I remain—adieu, England! adieu, Ormond! and, oh, cursed, cursed fool! adieu, Amanda Yorke!"

Riversdale darted from the room, and rushing down stairs, hastened to his lodgings, where he delayed not a moment in preparing for his journey, and left his native land, where only a short time before he might have gathered round him the enchantments of domestic bliss, and the endearments of faithful love, to wander in a foreign country —to spend his time and his wealth amongst

amongst those who knew not nor cared for him—to feel himself distant from home and affection—and to reflect, with torturing memory, that his own hand had dashed from him those two best blessings of life.

Ormond commiserated the unhappiness of Riversdale; they had been friends from their boyhood, and even their mutual passion for Amanda had not disturbed the good will that reigned between them.—"Poor fellow!" said Ormond, sympathizingly, as Riversdale departed; then added, with a happy sigh, "but thank God he was a fool!"

Amanda was resolute in declining parties abroad, and all places of public amusement; Ormond importuned her several times to accompany him to the theatre, until with tears she entreated him to desist, acknowledging as she did

so, that it pained her to the heart to refuse him.

"And I would die sooner than even this dear hand should be pained," said he, tenderly kissing it; "what then is the value of your peace of heart, Amanda? From this moment, your voice shall alone direct me, and my wish shall only be the echo of your own."

"For a few weeks only," said Amanda, with a downcast blush at her first allusion to their approaching nuptials.

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed Ormond, catching her rapturously to his breast—"Yes, yes, Amanda, in a few weeks you will know what a tyrant I shall become."

Those few lingering weeks at last passed over, and Ormond, with a beating heart and sparkling eye, hailed his wedding morn. Amanda, with an equal yet a more chastened joy, met him at the altar, and they pledged vows of love and

and faith to each other, which Heaven sanctified and sealed.

It was in the dead of winter, and a marriage jaunt, to rational folks like Ormond and Amanda, out of the question; the bridal party returned to Mrs. Yorke's to dinner, where only those who had attended at the ceremony were invited, and they consisted of the nearest relations of both parties.

Amanda was much agitated throughout the whole of the day; a thousand times she pressed her hand on the disgusting patch; and during a moment that the bridegroom stood alone with her in the recess of a window, she falteringly asked—"Ormond, do you repent?—are you not ashamed to show so disfigured a bride to your friends?"

"Thou dearest doubter," replied Ormond, caressing her; "is it only kisses

that will convince you?" and he pressed his lips fondly to the hateful patch.

Amanda blushed deeply, and attempted to retreat.

"Will you ask so foolish a question again?" whispered Ormond, detaining her graceful waist with his circling arm. "I will consider it henceforth as a challenge."

"I will never ask it again," answered Amanda. "Leave me, I beseech you!"

Ormond, seeing that she was confused beyond measure at her situation, released her; but too happy to speak generally, it was only with an effort that he could join at times in the conversation of the company.

At ten o'clock the guests departed; and in about an hour after Mrs. Yorke returned to the drawing-room, where Ormond had been left alone, and lighted him herself to the door of her daughter's

ter's chamber, where, with a tear and a blessing, she bade him good night.

With a palpitating heart, Ormond entered the dear and sacred apartment of his bride; a pair of wax lights stood on a toilet, at the farther end of the room, and a night-lamp, with its moonlight burner, threw from the mantelpiece, along with the blaze of the fire, a calm and tranquil light on the crimson bed, with its curtains closely drawn. A soft delicious stillness reigned around, broken only by the approaching footsteps of the lord of the scene.

With a hand trembling with rapture, Ormond draws aside the curtain: yes, Amanda is there, fairer even than the snowy folds in which she hides her blushing face. Ormond stoops down, and in ecstacy that cannot speak, gently removes the ivory hands that conceal the ruby mouth from his impassioned lips—

lips—Heavenly Powers! where is the hateful patch? what does he behold? two hazel eyes, bright in all the bewitchment of modest and conscious tenderness, for a moment meeting his, then bashfully sinking, like the eclipse of stars, beneath their long dark fringes.

Unfortunate eye! again it is in danger! Ormond nearly puts it out in real earnest now with kisses, and at last entreats his lovely bride to account for the apparent miracle.

"It is to my mother I owe this happiness," replied Amanda; "it was she who proposed the trial of your love and Riversdale's, to discover which attachment promised the surest constancy. As weeks must elapse ere I could uncover my eye, she prevailed upon me to practise, in the interval, this innocent and happy deception. Ah, how well my mother knew the inexperience of my

my heart! and how sweetly has she led me to the knowledge of true affection! Dear Ormond, I bless the hour that made me thine; nor shall my future life have a thought or a study that has not for its desire the felicity of the generous man, whose heart preserved its constancy, although his mistress did appear to him but with one eye."

END OF THE ONE-EYED BEAUTY.



THE

WOOD OF ROOVERSTANE.

HENRY Litchford was the child of an unfortunate mother: early in life she had been deceived into a false marriage, with a man far her superior in rank and fortune; but after having lived with him for several months, in a private manner, yet firmly believing herself to be his wife, she was informed that she had no legal claim upon him; and with a few pounds to defray her way, was sent back to her parents; while her inhuman betrayer set out for the Continent.

The

The poor girl returned to her native place in a state of derangement, from which she never recovered; in a few months after she gave birth to a son, and on the fourth day contrived, unperceived, to slip out of the house, and was heard of no more, until the following spring, when the body of a female was found in an adjacent river, which, from the circumstances attending the disappearance of this unhappy girl, was supposed to be hers, although, from the time it had lain in the water, the features had become undistinguishable.

Her son grew up a lad of rather better abilities than the common; he was a lively, spirited boy; but it was observed by those who best knew him, that after he was informed of the circumstances of his birth, and his mother's lamentable fate, his temper quite changed, and he became grave and melancholy,

lancholy, shunning society, and constantly seeking to bury himself in retired and secluded places.

His grandfather was a comfortable farmer: Henry had been brought up to the same occupation, and had pursued it with contentment and success, until this fatal knowledge saddened his peace of mind, and destroyed his spirit of industry. He conceived the most extraordinary fancy in his brain, that his father had decoyed away his mother, and either imprisoned or murdered her; for of her having committed suicide, he would not listen to, nor allow that the body found in the river had been hers.

He persisted so long and so positively in these strange notions, that his grandfather, fearing at last for the lad's intellects, applied to the clergyman for advice how he was to treat him.

Mr. Belton spoke to the young man, and

and reasoned, in the most forcible terms, on the absurdity of the ideas which he entertained, and begged him to give them up, as unfounded and chimerical in every sense, and ruinous to himself, in drawing him into a frame of mind that incapacitated him from pursuing the useful avocations of rationality.

Henry heard him in respectful silence; but it was evident that it proceeded from deference to the speaker's character, not from conviction of the truths of his arguments; and Mr. Belton, seeing no other unsound symptom about the lad, recommended it to his grandfather to leave time to work his cure; and that youth and its enjoyments would obliterate, by degrees, the melancholy impressions which the recent story of his mother had left upon his mind.

The farmer took the clergyman's advice,

vice, which, though good in most instances to his parishioners, failed in effect in this. Henry, left to himself, obtruded no longer his thoughts on others; but they were not, on that account, the less vividly at work within his own breast. Where Sarah Alton had met with her betrayer was at the distance of forty miles from her father's residence; he went by the name of Litchford; but whether that was his real name, was unknown. However, upon this vague knowledge, Henry set out on a discovery of his father. He mentioned his intentions to none, but privately absenting himself from his home, departed on his dark and visionary search.

When he reached Blysop, he found the people with whom his mother had dwelled long dead, and their family dispersed through the world. Some one

or

or two of the inhabitants recollected that such a girl as Sarah Alton had once lived in the village; but as she had gone off privately with Litchford, who was a stranger, they could remember nothing of him, nor knew any one of the name.

Disappointed in the hopes he had been living on—amongst strangers, who seemed to take neither interest nor care in his thoughts nor well-being—away from home, for the first time in his life, Henry acknowledged to himself that he had done rashly and wrong, in leaving his grandfather in so clandestine a manner; and reason began, at the same time, to point out to him the folly of the fancies he had distressed himself with, and the absurdity of his present search.

He made these reflections the second evening of his arrival at Blysop; and when

when all inquiry on the subject of his journey had proved fruitless. Regretting, and ashamed, he resolved to set out on his return home, the next morning; and accordingly commenced his route by break of day.

He had not travelled far, when he overtook a man, who, from the pack on his back, seemed to be a pedlar; and as they were both pursuing the same path, they accosted each other, and held on the road in company.

Henry told whither he was going; and the pedlar, still more communicative, said, that he was to strike across the country at the sixth mile stone, to travel to Canterbury, where he resided. He began to talk of the different families in the country in which they then were, and seemed to know them so well, far and near, that Henry asked

him if he knew any one of the name of Litchford?

The pedlar thought a little.—"I believe," said he, "there is an old gentleman of that name lives in these parts; but it is not in my walk, and I know but little about him."

"Has he any family?" asked Henry, his wild fancies again beginning to revive.

"No, not he," answered the pedlar; "he is an old, half-crazy hermit, who will sooner see a bird than a man.—Folks do talk queerly about him; they say he walks at night, when others are abed."

"Where does he live?" demanded Henry, hurriedly.

"Why some twenty miles off," replied his companion.

"The road we are going?" said Henry, assuming a careless tone.

"Yes,

"Yes, for about a dozen miles further on," answered the pedlar, "and then you strike off to the right, at the first turnpike gate."

Henry fell into a deep and agitating train of thought; his companion talked now unheeded, and at last bade him adieu, to pursue another road.

In about an hour more, Henry came upon the turnpike-gate; and impelled by his former chimerical ideas, he asked, how far it was to Mr. Litchford's, and what was the name of the place he resided at? for his fluttered imagination had made him forget to ask that question of the pedlar.

The keeper replied—"That Mr. Litchford's was eighteen miles distant, and that the name of his estate was Rooverstane."

Henry turned again from his home, full once more of strange hopes and hor-

rible conjectures. The day was not above half advanced, and he counted upon reaching the desired end of his journey in the evening.

About five o'clock in the afternoon, he stopped at a public-house by the road side, for some refreshment. The day had been extremely sultry, and he was weary, and sat rather long; on looking at his watch, he hastily started up, and throwing down a note on the table, demanded the balance of his fare.

He had not long left the alehouse, when a man overtook him, whom he recollected to have seen along with some others during the time of his late refreshment. The stranger civilly accosted him, and said, as they were going the same road, they might travel together.

Henry was in no mood for company, neither did he like the appearance of his new acquaintance. He could not, however,

ever, shake him off; and unwilling to appear less civil than the other, he slightly joined in conversation, but kept his oaken stick firm in his hand.

He seemed mistaken in his supposition; the man offered him no molestation, and talked in so careless and honest a manner, that Henry began to blame his prejudice, and insensibly forget his fears.—"Are we near Rooverstane?" asked Henry, as the evening began to steal darkly down upon them.

"Scarcely half a mile," answered the man; "strangers do not often go there. Perhaps you are a friend?"

"No," replied Henry; "I am going thither on a little business."

"You won't stay long," rejoined the man: "it is a dismal place, by all accounts: they say it is haunted."

"By what?" asked Henry, tremulously.

"Oh, by ghosts, to be sure," returned the man; "but I never saw any, and won't believe in them till I do. Look, you can see the house from hence."

He jumped into a gap of the hedge as he spoke, and gazed about him for a minute; then stepped down, and Henry anxiously ascended to view the place, which his wild imagination had conjured up as the solving destination of his unknown birth.

He had scarcely sent his eager eyes around him in search, when he felt himself knocked down from behind, and tumbling quite stunned into the ditch; he was, in that senseless condition, robbed of his watch and money, by the miscreant with whom he had, for the last two hours, travelled, and who had hitherto been awed by Henry's apparent strength from attacking him openly.

When Henry recovered from the blow,

blow, he found himself alone, and nearly in the dark: he called, but weak from his bruises, his voice scarcely rose above his breath; and no one approaching, nor any sound betokening the neighbourhood of a human being, he attempted to crawl along the road, in hopes of finding some shelter and assistance. He had not gone far until he came to a house; but too exhausted to observe its appearance, he had only strength to knock at the door, when he fell fainting against it. When he revived again, he found himself inside a room, and several people standing round him, while a woman was bathing his temples, and washing away the blood that was starting from them. As soon as he could speak, he told what had happened to him, and begged them to give him shelter for the night.

"I doubt if you could seek any other,"

said the woman, with good-natured compassion.

"You can rest here to-night, my poor lad," said one of the men, who seemed, from his age and authority, to be master of the house; "William will give you his bed: he can sleep by the fireside for one night."

"Yes, father, that I can," replied the young man spoken to; "poor soul, he has need of a bed to rest himself in, after such a mauling."

Henry was helped into bed; the good dame bound up his head, and giving him a cup of warm ale, the luckless traveller soon forgot his misfortunes in a deep and soothing slumber.

Next morning, he awoke with his head in great pain and confusion, and his shoulder, where the stick had partly lighted, stiff and sore; yet ill as he was, he could hear, with eager astonishment, that

that he was in one of the porter's lodges of Rooverstane; and that Randal, the occupier of it, had gone to inform Mr. Litchford of the robbery.

The agitation this intelligence threw his thoughts into, made his head much worse; and when Randal came back, accompanied by Mr. Litchford, Henry was all but in a burning fever: his temples ached so violently, that he could scarcely open his eyes; Mr. Litchford swam before them, like some indistinct and fearful vision, and every sound of his voice made the heart of the invalid thrill and palpitate.

Mr. Litchford ordered a surgeon to be sent for; and desiring Mrs. Randal to send to his housekeeper for whatever the patient required, he departed.

It was several days before Henry was able to sit up; and in that interval Mr. Litchford twice stopped at the lodge

to inquire after him, but had never again entered it.

The search after the robber was fruitless; and Henry found himself without a penny, upwards of fifty miles from home.

Unwilling that the Randals, kind as they were, should know who he really was, he told them that he had left his native place in quest of service; and as he had lost the little money which he had to support him on his way, he would be glad to stay where he was, if he could find a master to suit him.

As soon as Henry was able to walk about, he expressed his wish to go to Mr. Litchford, and thank him for his charity and attention to a stranger. Randal went along with him, to shew him the way, and to support him too, he found, at last; for Henry, as he approached the house of Rooverstane, became

came so excessively agitated, that he could scarcely have walked without assistance.

Mr. Litchford was at home, and Randal sent up a message, that the young lad who had been robbed was below, wishing to thank his honour for his kindness.

They were ordered to be shewn up to the library, where Mr. Litchford was; and Henry, his heart beating almost aloud, hung heavily on Randal's arm as they ascended the lofty staircase. The room they were ushered into was large and handsome, but looked gloomy, even in the sunny noon, owing to the darkening blinds which obscured every window.—"Good morrow, Randal," said Mr. Litchford, advancing a few steps. "Young man, I am glad to see you abroad: are you far from home?"

Henry for the first time distinctly

saw Mr. Litchford; he appeared to be upwards of sixty; his hair white as snow, and his thin, spare figure, bent and decrepid: his eyes were deeply sunk in his head, and every line in his face a perfect furrow; his features were marked and stern, inspiring gloom and awe in every beholder.

Henry, firmly believing that he was in the presence of his father, lost, in his emotion, all power of utterance; he was seized with such a trembling, that he was near sinking from Randal's arm, who, uttering an exclamation, supported him round the waist.

Mr. Litchford rung the bell, and ordered the housekeeper to bring some wine. It revived Henry so, that he was able to articulate one or two broken words of thanks; but he looked so pale and languid, and so young, that Mr. Litchford forgot his usual indifference,

and

and appeared to be considerably interested about the lad. He put some questions to Randal concerning him, who answered, as Henry had told him, that he was a young lad seeking service, and would be glad, if he could procure a place, to remain where he was, as he had no money now to carry him farther.

"Have you no parents?" demanded Mr. Litchford, turning to Henry. "You do not seem to be a mendicant—why are you thus alone?"

"I am an orphan," faltered Henry, large tears bursting from his eyes.

"Poor boy!" said the housekeeper, in a commiserating tone, and casting a beseeching look towards her master.

Mr. Litchford was affected by Henry's distress; he forbore further interrogations concerning his family; and in a softened voice, asked him what service he was fit for?

"Any!

"Any!—all!" cried Henry, with eager energy. "I will learn: only keep me with you, and I will serve you with my life!"

The fervency of the solicitation surprised Mr. Litchford, but placing it to the anxiety of the destitute boy to find a home, he thought of it but for a moment, and then said—"Mrs. Jiles, take the lad to the butler, and let him try if he is fit for any service. We must hope that in one so young the countenance is sufficient recommendation."

The ecstacy of Henry was almost beyond the bounds of reason. He was then in the house of his father! to remain with him—to be acknowledged by him! and—and the dark thought sunk heavy on his joy—the fate of that poor, lost mother was now to be cleared up, and made fairer, if not more happy, to the world.

Mrs.

Mrs. Jiles took him to the butler, and between them it was agreed that Henry should wait at table, in room of a lad whose turn lay more for stable service than household.

Henry, who was naturally of a sweet and obedient temper, soon became a favourite with the domestics of Roovenstone, and might have been a still greater, had he joined more amongst them; but he was so much engrossed watching and attending his supposed father, that he had neither time nor inclination to bestow on any other pursuit.

Yet although he waited constantly at table, and snatched every opportunity to be of service to his master, it was many days before Mr. Litchford noticed him particularly, or seemed to remember that he was a stranger; until one morning, in carrying up a parcel of new books to the library, and stopping to unpack them,

Mr.

Mr. Litchford entered into conversation with him, and asked him how he liked Rooverstane?

"I never wish to quit it," answered Henry, eagerly.

"The favour is mutual then," said Mr. Litchford; "Jiles and Beaton are both pleased with you. They tell me you have been well educated. Were you always intended for a menial capacity?"

Henry's heart palpitated; its emotion extended to his voice, as he falteringly replied—"My father deserted me before I was born; but for my grandfather, I had starved, or been a beggar."

"Ah, but you found a friend," said Mr. Litchford, with a deep sigh. "And have you too forsaken your unhappy mother?"

"My mother!" repeated Henry, flushing alternately from ashy pale to burning

ing red; "my mother is no more: they say she drowned herself, but I will not believe it!" He dropped the books, and burying his face in both his hands, burst into tears.

"My poor lad," said Mr. Litchford, feelingly, "I have distressed you, while I wished to befriend you."

"You can be all to me!" passionately exclaimed Henry, flinging himself at Mr. Litchford's feet, and clasping his knees.

Mr. Litchford uttered a faint cry, and sunk back on the sofa behind him.

Henry sprung up in alarm; his master lay gasping; his face the hue of death, and heavy drops of perspiration standing on his brow. Henry raised his head, and anxiously wiped off the cold sweat.

"Who knelt to me?" wildly but feebly demanded Mr. Litchford. "Who knelt

knelt and clasped my knees?" and he groaned in horror.

"I—I was so bold," said Henry, humbly; and it was trembling on his lips to say—"Your son was at your feet."

"You!" said Mr. Litchford, looking up, with a heavy sigh of exhaustion; "was it you?" and he gazed wildly and fearfully around the room.

Henry shrunk from the awful expression of his wandering eyes, and again the thought of a murdered mother thrilled coldly through his heart.

Mr. Litchford rose hastily, as if he had but that moment recalled his recollection, and approaching the table, busied himself again with the books.—"What county are you of?" said he, with the voice of one who tears himself from some haunting memory.

"Surrey," replied Henry, "near Arundel,"

Arundel," and he stole a look of trembling inquiry at Mr. Litchford.

His master's cheek preserved unchanged its deathlike hue: he showed no sign of confusion or remembrance, and immediately asked—"What other name have you than Henry?"

"Litchford," answered the lad.

"Litchford!" repeated his master. "Litchford!—Change it! it is an unhappy name!" and a smothered groan seemed to corroborate his words.

"To me, and to my poor betrayed mother, it has been so," replied Henry.

"Betrayed!" said Mr. Litchford. "Did the villain betray, and then leave her?"

"Only under a false marriage," answered Henry, blushing. "My mother was virtuous, although unfortunate."

"Oh, seduction! d——d, d——d seduction!" exclaimed Mr. Litchford, in

in a voice of the wildest and most appalling agony; "if there be a crime on earth that drives men's souls to hell, it is damnable seduction! My God! my God! have mercy upon me!"

His frantic gestures, and clenched hands, raised in all the agony of hopeless despair, dismayed Henry. He shrunk back, pale and staring, and gazed at his master in silent terror; until perceiving his arms dropping powerlessly down, and his head sinking on his breast, he sprung forward in time to catch Mr. Litchford senseless in his arms.

He laid him gently along the sofa, and attempted to recover him; but finding his efforts fruitless, he rung the bell in alarm, and brought up all the servants in the house.

The moment Mrs. Jiles saw what was the matter, she dismissed the other attendants,

attendants, and rather angrily chid Henry for raising such an alarm.

"I was terrified," replied he; "I never saw a man in a fainting fit before, and I had tried in vain to recover him."

"My master is subject to such fits," answered the housekeeper. "Go you away—I can manage him myself."

Henry unwillingly went, but he was accustomed implicitly to obey Mrs. Jiles.

At dinner Mr. Litchford appeared as usual; no notice whatever was taken of his previous indisposition; but in Henry's mind the impression of it had sunk deep: he was more than ever convinced that Mr. Litchford was his father, and haunted by dark conjectures on the fate of his mother.

Mr. Litchford lived in a strange retired manner; his fortune was immense, and his family had ever borne great

weight

weight in the county; but he gave up these advantages, and lived the life of a hermit.

A stranger, or a neighbour, never entered his door, unless upon business; with company he had long, long parted; and sometimes, from the one year's end to the other, he would never be seen beyond his own premises.

To his servants and tenants he was a good, but not a familiar master; if any misfortune happened to them, he was ever ready to assist with voice and purse; but he heard their good fortune with the same unvaried countenance which he did their bad. Amidst the gay and the happy, even though made so by his own bounty, a smile was never seen to cross his features, nor a look to share in their joy. Ever gloomy and silent, he shunned the approach of a human form; and the peasants around,

aware

aware of his lonely humour, and grateful to him for the mild sway which he exercised over them, avoided his pleasure-grounds, and left his lovely walks to the deep solitude which he wished.

These habits, so unlike those of the generality of mankind, together with the ideas that filled the visionary mind of Henry, could not fail to occasion the deepest interest and observation, in a breast that was, like his, so full of hope, suspicion, and doubt. He watched every look and word of Mr. Litchford, with the most intense scrutiny; but excepting that once in the library, the thick and dark veil which ever hung over his thoughts and feelings was never again withdrawn; and in the still, melancholy silence of his master, he could not discover even a recollection of that strange and afflicting scene.

Mr. Litchford seldom went out in the day-

daytime, unless called forth on business; and although Henry had heard that he rambled through the woods at night, he had never, from his own knowledge, been able to make that discovery, as he slept in a distant part of the house from Mr. Litchford's apartment, in a room which overlooked a walled court, that hid the adjoining grounds from view.

He had several times ventured to introduce the subject of his master's peculiarities, in the presence of the butler and the housekeeper; but they had been long in the service of Rooverstane, and chose not to talk on their master's failings; they merely assented that he was a man of singular habits, but made no remarks on what might have given rise to them. Henry, who was above interrogating the lower servants, had only his own thoughts to consult, which became

came every day more gloomy, anxious, and bewildered.

One morning, that Mr. Litchford was going to ride, Henry, who had gone to the stable to order the horses, in returning with them, encountered an elderly woman in the walk that led to the kitchen.

"My master is just coming out, Mrs. Weston," said the groom, as he passed, "so you had better keep out of the way."

"I shall take good care he does not see me," replied the woman; "I am just stepping in to ask how Mrs. Jiles does."

"Who is that?" inquired Henry.

"Miss Litchford's nurse," answered the groom; "and my master never could endure to see her, since he lost his daughter."

"Ah! so Mr. Litchford was married," rejoined Henry; "had he any more family?"

"Not that I ever heard of," replied the groom; "but I don't belong to these parts: I have been here only a year, and don't know much about my master's family."

They approached the front of the house, where Mr. Litchford was standing waiting for them.

When he and his groom rode off, Henry mechanically strayed down one of the walks, his mind totally absorbed by this new information. Mr. Litchford a married man! he had then a double incentive to conceal his amour from all human knowledge: And his poor mother!—"Oh God! he has murdered her!" shrieked Henry, convulsively. "It is she, gasping her last, and clinging to his knees for mercy, that so horribly haunts his harrowed recollection. He murdered her!—Mother!—poor, poor mother!"

He

He had wrought himself into a frenzy of conviction; and flinging himself amongst the grass, rolled there in an agony of tears and horror.

It was near dinner-time before he got home; and then he appeared with a face so pale and spectre-like, that the butler was startled by his appearance. Henry denied being ill, and waited at table as usual, or rather, he took his station in the room as usual, for to serve he was unable to do, and committed a thousand absent blunders.

That night he slipped from his room, and stealing out unseen, hid himself in a clump of trees, that commanded an entire view of the house. He knew he was watching to discover the truth of Mr. Litchford's midnight wanderings; but what other mystery he expected to penetrate, he could not bring his con-

fused mind to form any regular reflection on.

He waited two long hours without a shade being seen, but the tall line of the trees, which the moon threw on the lawn. At last even they disappeared, and the lamp of night set in a dusky, but not entirely dark sky. In this obscure light Henry perceived an undistinguishable shape at some short distance from him.

The lad's blood curdled with an undescribable sensation; his trembling knees knocked upon each other, and, sinking against a tree, he rivetted his eyes with a burning earnestness on the distant shadow. As it advanced, Henry perceived that it was the object of his gloomy watch. It was Mr. Litchford; he wore a dressing-gown, of a dark colour, and with arms folded on his breast, and head bent sadly down, he

he walked slowly along a pathway, close to where his unseen observer stood. When he had passed on several yards, Henry stole after him, still keeping in the shade of the trees. Mr. Litchford pursued his path uninterruptedly, until he came to a thick and extensive grove, into which he entered, and in the darkness there, Henry lost sight of him altogether.

He groped carefully along, afraid lest he should come against his master, when he was stopped short by the sound of a human voice. It came so unexpectedly upon him, that, for a moment, every pulse in his frame seemed to turn cold, and stand still. He listened, in breathless surprise, but the next minute convinced him that it was his master's voice he heard; but so low, so agonized, and so suffocated with groans, that he could not catch a single sentence, only the

word "Mercy! mercy!" numberless times repeated, as if uttered by a heart in the depth of torture and despair.

Henry vainly attempted to get in sight of Mr. Litchford; he was evidently near him, but the thick branching trees obscured completely the sombre light of the sky, and left the wood so dark, that Henry, aware, from the sound of the voice, that his master was somewhere near him, was afraid to move, lest he should unawares disturb this sad mourner of the night. Suddenly the voice ceased, but no rustling of footsteps announced that Mr. Litchford was departing; on the contrary, all was so deathlike still, that Henry fancied he could hear his own breathing.

A time, that to him appeared hours in length, passed on in this manner, when a deep and heavy respiration echoed along the air, followed by several

ful broken and long-drawn sighs, which seemed to Henry as if the unhappy man had been in a swoon, and was but then recovering. Again the same agonizing prayers for mercy were repeated; and Henry, ever piously inclined, and when his mind was calmed a little from its first tumult, fell upon his knees, and offered up to Heaven an humble petition for himself, and the poor penitent beside him, whatever might be his sins to him. From that posture he involuntarily sunk upon the soft grass; sleep, in spite of his watchfulness, stole over him, and when he awoke, it was broad daylight, and the sun shining bright in his face.

Confounded for a moment, he gazed around upon the velvet turf that was his bed, and the green branches that bent over his head, until recollection awakened to the remembrance of his

last night's adventure; and he started up in dismay, dreading to encounter the indignant eye of his master. He was gone, and all around in perfect solitude.

The first thing Henry did, was to mark, with his knife, the tree against which he had stood, and then to search round for any appearance where Mr. Litchford might have been extended. The surrounding verdure consisted chiefly of mossy turf, which is more elastic than grass, and not so easily crushed; but along the root of a holly bush he thought he could discern a recent pressure, which, he doubted not, had been made by Mr. Litchford.

What Henry looked for, he shuddered to acknowledge, even to himself; but his eye measured the ground, and a load was removed from his darkly-conjecturing heart, when his shrinking glance

glance assured him, that the spaces around were not long enough to answer to his horrible suspicions. He broke off a few small branches, and laid them in such a position, that the place could not be again visited without their being unobservably disarranged. He got home unchallenged, and found his absence had not been noticed. Being an early riser, none appeared surprised that he had gone out unperceived. When he waited at breakfast, he looked anxiously at Mr. Litchford, but no sign was visible that he had been disordered through the night, or that he had any knowledge of Henry's nocturnal attendance.

Mr. Litchford, who was engaged in settling a dispute between two of his tenants, rode out immediately after, and Henry, as usual, asked the butler and the housekeeper for their commands, before he otherwise disposed of himself.

Mrs. Jiles, who was the only one that had occasion for him that morning, took him into her room, and shutting the door, said—"Henry, I want you to go a message for me to a house down on the common. It is the first on the right-hand side of the road as you pass the mill; but any body will tell you where dame Weston lives. Give her this letter: it is to a nephew of mine in London, recommending a son of hers who is going thither. You need not mention to your master, unless he particularly question you, where you have been: not that I wish you to enter into any underhand doings, but my master neither likes to see nor to hear of dame Weston, although he allows her the cottage she dwells in, and forty pounds a-year."

This was a most welcome message to Henry: it was the place he had secretly been

been bound for, and no errand was ever gone more expeditiously than was his to Mrs. Weston. He found the old dame at home—loquacious, and liking to hear none speak so well as herself.

It was no difficult matter to turn the conversation on the family of Rooverstane. Dame Weston delighted to get upon her favourite theme, and above all, to be so unweariedly listened to, entered into all her history of nurseship; and talked, with regretting triumph, of the gay days that Rooverstane had once seen.

"I should think," said Henry, "that Mr. Litchford would take a pleasure in seeing one who nursed his daughter, and loved her so well as you did."

"To be sure, any rational person would think so," replied Mrs. Weston; "but it is just the reverse; he turns from me as hew ould a serpent; why, I cannot

say; for had little Miss been my own, ten times over, I could not have loved her more, nor taken better care of her; and well worthy was she of it—a finer child never sat on a nurse's knee: I was always with her in her mother's chamber, for my mistress was a sickly lady, and seldom went down stairs. When she died, my little Miss was the delight of her father's heart: he would not suffer her to leave him, and a power of fine masters and mistresses came to teach her every thing that was in the world; and a queen of a creature she was; she played on the piony, and drew every tree that grew in the park, as natural as if they had grown on the paper. The gentlemen came crowding to Rooverstane to see her, and to court her; but, woe to us all! a vile rascal of a tenant's son, that should have been hanged, had bewitched my little Miss; and nothing would content

content her but she must marry Tom Hanwick. Her father was like one distracted, and swore he would blow out Tom Hanwick's brains, the first time he saw him near Rooverstane again. My little Miss was locked up; and then, Lord be good unto me! what had folks the boldness to say, but that she was with child to this young blackguard! Miss Litchford of Rooverstane, to Tom Hanwick, the tenant's son!—woe is me! there was a sad downcome! I was married then; but I went up to Rooverstane, and wanted sore to see my poor child; but she was locked fast up; and, alas! I was told there that the wicked story I had just heard was but too true. I came home a sad and sorrowful woman that day; and, Lord forgive me! but I think if I had met Tom Hanwick, I would have saved Mr. Litchford the trouble of knocking out his brains. I

sat

sat crying, and unable to work, when, in the dusk of the evening, a tap came to the door, and in walked my little Miss. She fell into my arms, white and trembling as a frightened lamb, and implored me to hide her, until she could run away to Tom Hanwick. I soothed and fondled my darling child; but my heart turned at the rascal's name, and I could not help cursing, to her face, the day she had ever seen him. She cried to me not to curse him, for that he was her husband, and that she would rather be with Tom Hanwick in the poorest hut, than with a lord in a palace. There was witchcraft! nothing but that, I will hold to my dying day, could ever have distracted a grand lady like my little Miss for a churl of a hind like Tom Hanwick; and I will as boldly say, that she was married to him, for the falling snow is not purer than was the heart of

my

my poor lost child. But I could not tell her where Tom Hanwick was, for he had left the country, and gone no one knew whither. Her heart was like to break when I told her so; and sore did she cry that she would follow him, if it were the world over. Alas! alas! God knows where she followed him, or how that gentle creature who had never faced a surly blast, nor ever trod an uneven road, bore up against the hardships that must have been her fate. I wanted her to lie down, for she was in a sad taking; but the words had not well passed my lips, when in entered her angry father, with two or three servants. She flew to me, and fastened round my neck; I clasped the darling—but they tore her shrieking from me; and from that hour to this I have never seen her more."

Mrs. Weston's voice had faltered in several

ral parts of her narration; but here burst into tears, and clasping her ıds, wept bitterly.

Henry had listened in breathless attention, nor interrupted her recital by one word. It was a story to interest even the feelings of a stranger; how much more then did Henry sympathize in it, who imagined he was listening to the unhappy fate of a sister. His eyes were suffused with tears, and his breathing thick and palpitating. For a few seconds neither spoke—when Henry, in a pitying, broken voice, said—"She did not die then?"

"Heaven only knows her fate," replied Mrs. Weston: "she contrived to escape from Rooverstane, four days after I last saw her, and from that hour she has never, never been heard of."

"And Hanwick?" asked Henry.

"Nor

"Nor Hanwick either," answered Mrs. Weston.

"How did Mr. Litchford bear his daughter's flight?" again inquired Henry.

"It went nigh to be his death," replied Mrs. Weston; "for he doted on her. He fevered for many a day; and when he was able to leave home, the doctors sent him to some foreign parts for his health; but, alack-a-day! he came back in about three years, as poorly as when he had set out; and since then Rooverstane has been the lonely, cheerless place it is now."

"But surely," said Henry, "there was search made after Hanwick and Miss Litchford?"

"There was," said Mrs. Weston; "several of Mr. Litchford's friends set an inquiry on foot; for he, poor gentleman, lay all but dead of sorrow for his daughter's flight. And old farmer Hanwick,

wick, he was sorely grieved at the disappearance of his son, and said, he had sent him to London, at Mr. Litchford's command; and from the day Tom Hanwick left home, he was never heard of either."

Mrs. Weston shook her head mysteriously, and heaved a deep and meaning sigh.

"What!" said Henry, in a fearful whisper.

"I said nothing," replied Mrs. Weston. "To be sure farmer Hanwick did at times speak in a strange manner; but grief often makes people talk oddly. He did not live to see Mr. Litchford return, and now there is not a Hanwick in the country round: pity—pity there ever should have been one!"

"Is it many years since this sad business happened?" demanded Henry.

"Twenty-two years on the eighteenth of

of last October," replied Mrs. Weston: "well do I remember the sorrowful time."

That was four years previous to Henry's birth, and Mr. Litchford had then been long a widower.

He left Mrs. Weston's, confused in every thought, yet still devoted to the belief that Mr. Litchford was his father; though the doubtful fate of Miss Litchford and Hanwick found room, to add still more to the perplexity of his mind. The former he thought, in all probability, had wandered after her lover, and died of hardship and heartbreak; but the latter—whither had Hanwick gone? New, and equally horrifying fancies as his former ones, crowded upon his imagination, and he felt as if derangement would overtake him, if he remained long in the torturing state of doubt in which he then was.

Henry,

Henry, through the remainder of the day, was so lost in reflection, as to appear like one stupified. At night he resolved again to watch Mr. Litchford; but throwing himself on his bed, to wait a still hour to steal out, sleep insensibly stole over him; and worn out by his last night's anxiety and subsequent excitement of mind, he forgot himself in a deep and heavy slumber, until the beams of the following morning awoke him.

Bitterly did he reproach himself for his indolence; and his first leisure moment he hastened to the wood, and tracing out the notched tree, he found that Mr. Litchford had again paid his mournful visit, and to the same place, as the branches which Henry had laid along the turf, were crushed and scattered about. "What does he remember here?" demanded Henry, internally, as he wistfully gazed around.—"What brings him

to

to this solitary spot, and only at the hidden hour of midnight?"

Henry shuddered and started, as a bird rustled through the branches beside him. Again he measured the place with his eye, but the glance was full of horror, as if he feared the earth would gape at his feet. Still he could not discover sufficient space to answer his dark ideas; he could stride along at one step the spare ground between all the trees within his sight. He gathered some more branches, and placing them where the former had been, resolved, if life were left to him, to be Mr. Litchford's unseen companion that night, and penetrate, if possible, this sad mystery.

Musing to perfect abstraction, he strolled some distance through the grounds, nor saw another until he was accosted by a hollow, but manly voice.

Henry looked up as from a dream, and

and perceived his saluter to be a stranger, whom he had of late frequently met, and who, on all occasions, had shewn an evident desire to enter into conversation with him.

Henry had not been backward to form the acquaintance; the stranger was pleasing and intelligent; besides, he was sick, had lost an arm, and wore a large patch over one of his eyes, all of which were claims not to be resisted by the young and compassionating heart of Henry.

"Let us rest a few minutes," said the stranger; "it is not often I come hither, and the distance has fatigued me."

"I do not think I ever saw you in the grounds of Rooverstane before," replied Henry, as they sat down together.

"But I have often been in them," said the stranger, with a smothered sigh.

"Are

"Are you a native of this place?" asked Henry.

His companion was silent for a few seconds; then, in a low voice, replied—"Yes; but I am now a stranger."

"What! all your friends dead?" exclaimed Henry, in a voice of sympathizing pity.

The expression of Henry's face was not to be doubted; truth, and candour, and benevolence, shone in its feature; the stranger had often anxiously read it, for he wished to trust much to it.—"You pity me," said he: "perhaps, were I to tell you my sad story, you would pity me still more; and let me find a friend in you; for unless you become one, I have none else here—nor any where, I fear."

"I!" said Henry, deeply attracted by the voice and manner of his companion. "How can I be your friend,

more

more than I am already? I wish you well; but I have nothing in my power."

"Much—perhaps every thing, to serve me," eagerly answered the stranger. "Will you be secret?"

Henry looked irresolute.—"The secret contains nothing improper?" said he.

"Nothing, nothing!" answered the stranger; "it only contains something miserable. I have no intention to lead you into wrong: all I ask of you, is to procure me some information, on a subject which the being ignorant of has wrung my heart for many a long year."

"What is it?" inquired Henry, earnestly. "What I can honestly do for you, all that will I do."

"I will trust you," said the stranger; "if you cannot assist, you look as if you would not betray." Here he became agitated, and faltered while he said

said—" Have you ever heard of Miss Litchford?"

Henry started from the ground as he exclaimed—" Good God! are you Hanwick?"

The stranger looked amazed at hearing his name; then anxiously said—" Then you have heard my sad story?"

" Yes, oh yes!" said Henry; " Mrs. Weston told me all."

" Where is she? where then is my Katherine?" cried Hanwick, in wild emotion. " Oh God! tell me!"

" Do you not know?" demanded Henry, in astonishment.

" She is dead then!" exclaimed Hanwick. He sank back on the grass, and groaned in despairing anguish.

Henry's gentle heart melted at the sight of the poor stranger's grief, and he hastened to say—" No one has heard

of her death. Did she not leave the country with you?"

"With me!" uttered Hanwick, "with me! oh! would to God she had! Hardly as I have fared, it would have been bliss to have shared it together. Went with me! What is it they say?"

Henry briefly ran over all that Mrs. Weston had told him, and for a few minutes Hanwick suffered himself to be overpowered with joy, with the idea that Miss Litchford might still live; then saddening again to despondency, he sorrowfully uttered—"But where has she been these long, long years? She is no longer alive! Oh, dear Katherine, thou hast wandered after me, and died amongst strangers!"

Hanwick's grief returned again as violently as at first, and Henry knew not how to offer him consolation, for he hardly believed it possible that Miss Litchford

Litchford could be still alive, after having been lost two and twenty years.

When Hanwick came a little to himself, he anxiously said—"And was Katherine so slandered?—the best and the purest being that ever bore a woman's form! Did they dare to traduce her so? My love!—my wife!"

"You *were* married then?" demanded Henry, incautiously.

Fire flashed through the moistened eyes of Hanwick; he struck his forehead as he vehemently exclaimed—"Did she not descend sufficiently to be my wife? Oh God! thou art a better judge than she has found on earth! Unfortunate Katherine! was it for such a humble wretch as I, that fame, and happiness, and life were sacrificed!" Emotion choked his further utterance, and laying his head on his solitary hand, he groaned in the convulsive anguish of his mind.

—"She was my wife!" exclaimed he, suddenly raising his head, with a fierce glance at Henry.

The boy was gazing steadfastly upon him, his eyes glistening with pitying tears.

Hanwick's indignation subsided at the look; he extended his hand, and faltered—"Forgive me—you know not what I feel."

"Oh, how I pity you!" said Henry, as he kindly clasped the atoning hand: "what is it I can do for you? I think I would assist you almost with my life."

"May God reward your compassion!" said Hanwick: "my kind lad, I ask of you no hazardous service—do not mention that I am in the country. Mr. Litchford has been my bitterest enemy, nor is it likely that his malice is yet extinct. But you live under the same roof with him—oh, endeavour to procure

cure me some intelligence of Katherine! for God's sake, relieve the broken-hearted! I have none to make proper inquiries of; my parents are dead, and an only brother of mine is gone I know not whither: almost a new race has sprung up around: some people I formerly knew still remain, but I dare not trust them, and I dread to ask questions, lest they discover me. Despair drove me to seek a stranger—your countenance seemed a faithful one; for Heaven's sake do not betray me! you see it is neither a bad nor a dangerous service I would beg of you."

"I will not betray you," replied Henry, in a voice that required no confirming oath; "but, alas! I doubt my power to be of use to you. The butler and the housekeeper may probably remember Miss Litchford, but they neither encourage nor answer remarks on such fa-

mily matters as those. The other servants have been a shorter period at Rooverstane, much within the date of your unhappy story. Until a day ago, I never even knew that there was a Miss Litchford, and then her name was mentioned only by the merest chance, and by one who just knew that such a person had once been, and nothing more. Mrs. Weston's intelligence, I should think most to be depended on, and she says that Miss Litchford left the country at the same time with yourself, and has never since been heard of."

"Mr. Litchford may probably know more," remarked Hanwick.

"But I shall never be able to gather any information from him," rejoined Henry; and then, with all the unreflective incautiousness of youth, he entered upon a narration of Mr. Litchford's retired habits, his reserve, his love

of

of solitude, his seclusion from all company, and finally, his midnight wanderings and penitent despair.

Hanwick listened with intense interest—"And was it," said he, as Henry concluded, "curiosity alone that prompted you to watch so narrowly the conduct of Mr. Litchford?"

Henry blushed, and became agitated. Hanwick pressed to know the cause, and at last drew from his youthful companion a hesitating acknowledgment of all the strange doubts which agitated his mind concerning himself.

"I do not think your surmises have any just grounds," said Hanwick; "although you have not given absolute words to what you suspect, yet I can thoroughly read your conjectures: they are too horrid; and, much as I have reason to dislike Mr. Litchford, I could stake my life that they are wrong—

wrong in every supposition, for Mr. Litchford, even in his happiest days, was ever a man of the most unblemished morals, and, except to his daughter and me, of unfailing benevolence and humanity."

"Oh God! then where is my mother?" ejaculated Henry.

"At peace, long ago," answered Hanwick. "Seek not, Henry, to drag the broken-hearted from the only shelter in which they can find repose. Be happy that she has escaped eighteen weary years of wo."

"Dead—in that horrible river!" exclaimed Henry, impetuously. "No, no! she never died there!"

It was now Hanwick's turn to look with compassion on Henry, who thus allowed himself to be the slave of a fancied misery, while such an object of real sorrow as he stood by.—"Are you serious

rious in your intention of watching again to-night?" inquired he.

"Serious as death!" replied Henry, forcibly.

"Then I will accompany you," continued Hanwick. "I will meet you in the clump of trees, in which you mention having waited him before—I know it well," and a deep sigh of recollection heaved his breast.

They parted, mutually depressed—Henry's thoughts, with this most unexpected meeting with Hanwick, in greater consternation than ever. Restless, almost to feverishness, he passed the remainder of the day, looking forward, with a sick, yet dreading impatience, to the coming night.

He attended at dinner. Mr. Litchford was taciturn and abstracted, as usual: Henry's eyes never left his face, but nothing was there save deep and

settled gravity, imprinting almost the impenetrableness of death upon his sunk and worn features, which seemed to grow every succeeding minute more ghastly, in the gaze of the observer.

At nine o'clock in the evening it was Mr. Litchford's custom to retire to his chamber for the night, and it was expected that the whole household should be in theirs by eleven.

A little before the last-mentioned hour, Henry, with a breathless heart, left his room, on his anxious and mysterious watch. He locked the door, that no person might enter in his absence, and gliding along the dark passages, slipped out upon the lawn, and with startled speed hastened to the appointed place.

He found Hanwick already there, who, while they waited together, told Henry, that at the time of the discovery

very of Miss Litchford's attachment and his, Mr. Litchford prevailed on his father to send him to London, until the affections of his daughter should be in part disengaged from her lowly and favoured lover.

The farmer, ignorant of his son's marriage, hastened to oblige his patron; and young Hanwick, debarred the sight of Miss Litchford, who was kept a strict prisoner, and unwilling of himself to divulge their union, reluctantly, at his father's reiterated desire, departed for London, where he was no sooner arrived, than he was entrapped for East India service, and held in captivity until he was shipped off.

When landed in India, he was sent far up in the interior, and remained there upwards of nineteen years, when a shot in battle carried away his left arm, and occasioned his being discharged.

"I frequently wrote," continued Hanwick; "but we were so far from the coast, and so little care taken of our letters, that I scarcely believe one in a thousand reached its destination, and of mine none; for during my whole residence in India, I never heard from home, or of home. Escape was in vain, and suffering death by the day, was I obliged to remain. I cannot doubt that I was entrapped by Mr. Litchford's desire: may God forgive him! he has made life a desolate path to me."

Hanwick also told Henry, that his only hope of Katherine's existence was her disappearance: her father, on the discovery of her marriage, might have confined her in some distant place, as having too much disgraced her family ever again to appear in the world.

"But how shall you be able to know the

the justice of that conjecture?" demanded Henry.

"I trust to you, and some kind chance, for it," answered Hanwick; "but my doubts must be soon satisfied, or at all risk I will burst into his presence, and demand my wife and child." His voice shook as he pronounced the last three words; and in a saddened tone he added—"Ah, Henry, have I either now?"

"Be comforted," said Henry, soothingly; "Heaven may yet have a balm in store for your wounded heart."

Hanwick replied by a desponding sigh.

"Hist! hist!" whispered Henry, "here is Mr. Litchford."

"Where?—where?" cried Hanwick, in a low voice; and as he looked in the direction which Henry pointed to him, he impressively said—"Good God! when

when I last saw him, what a happy man I was! but the change is not mine alone."

Mr. Litchford pursued the same path which he had done on Henry's former watch; the two men stole silently after him, and followed him into the deep wood, where his shrine of penitence and grief seemed to be contained. Again was the midnight stillness broken with the groans of an agonized spirit, and again was that despairing voice heard to cry for "Mercy! mercy!" A dewy rain was falling, but Mr. Litchford heeded it not; he lay prostrate on the cold ground, exposing to the unwholesome damps of night a frame that seemed too feeble to bear even the softest breath of a summer noon.

Nearly two hours elapsed before he departed; and Hanwick and his companion, wet and cold as the night was, waited

waited until dawn, to examine this mysterious place of sorrow.

"Here! here!" cried Henry, as the ruddy streaks of morning spread along the clearing sky—"here! here! By Heaven, the very spot on which he lay the two preceding nights!"

Hanwick intently eyed the ground.

"What is it you think?" asked Henry, falteringly, as he gazed on the changing countenance of Hanwick.

"Let us get a spade," said Hanwick, without moving his eyes from the spot.

Henry shuddered, and turned pale—"Ah, Hanwick, what is it?"

"A horrible suspicion!" replied Hanwick, in a hollow voice.

"Oh, my poor mother!" gasped Henry.

"No, no," replied Hanwick, "she is not here; but what may have become of my poor helpless infant?"

"Oh,

"Oh, what a horrible thought!" said Henry, his blood beginning to freeze.

"Not so horrible as your own, Henry. But let us get a spade; a few shovelfuls of earth will satisfy the doubts of both—and you say this place is seldom frequented."

Henry, at the almost command of Hanwick, departed to procure the implements wanted; but his knees trembled at every step, and, too late, he reflected on the unwarrantable liberty he had taken, in becoming a spy upon the actions of Mr. Litchford, and introducing another and an obnoxious person upon his privacy. He dreaded to think on the end his adventure was likely to have, and with irresolute, yet anxious steps, he returned with his mission to the mysterious wood.

"How long you have stayed!" said Hanwick, snatching the spade from him,

him, and striking it into the mossy turf.

. The first shovelful of mould fell at Henry's feet; he grew pale as clay, and fearfully uttered—" Oh, Hanwick, Mr. Litchford!"

" Were he standing by," interrupted Hanwick, with earnest resolve, " I would see what is below. Do you shrink, Henry, that was, so short time ago, so horribly fancying what might be underneath here?"

" Oh God, I know not what I do!" said Henry, shuddering.

Hanwick dug resolutely on, but with only one arm, his work made not much speed. He gave the spade to Henry, and desired him to dig deep; but for the first moment, the lad had scarcely nerve to set his foot firm on the bar of the shovel. Hurried on by Hanwick, he however quickly regained his strength,

and

and with powerful force threw shovelful and shovelful rapidly aside, while Hanwick constantly cried—"Dig, dig, right where he lay!"

The earth around the spot was soon laid bare of its verdure, and the black mould began to yawn beneath the disturbing strokes.

Hanwick stood over the opening chasm, life seeming to start in his intense gaze, when, with a horrible cry, he wildly exclaimed—"Ah God! it comes—it comes!" and both men shrunk back paralyzed, as a bone was thrown up in the earth, and the appearance of a human skeleton was visibly indicated beneath. It was that of a full-grown person, and Henry, reeling from the horrid sight, half shrieked—"It is my mother!" when he fell back senseless on the earth.

A few moments of forgetfulness would have

have been mercy to Hanwick, but he stood with every sense awakened to a suspicion that ran through his brain like scorching fire. His eyes rivetted on the half-apparent skeleton, his bloodless cheek, his quivering lips, seemed silently to ask a volume of horrible questions: in vain a death of agitation was over him —the mouldering bones started not up to say what form they had once borne, nor who had laid them in so lonely and unhallowed a bed: still as the earth into which they were crumbling, they lay quietly stretched at his feet; not a voice nor a motion, to say—"We once lived—we once grieved."

At last he raised his eyes from these sad mementos of mortality, and fixing them wildly on heaven, exclaimed—"Is it then so, oh God? Have I wandered through woes and foreign climes, to bear testimony to thy unerring retribution? Oh,

Oh, grant me strength—oh, grant me reason, to guide thy avenging will!"

He had felt—now he was to act; no longer desiring secrecy, he shouted aloud for assistance, and then turned his attention to Henry, who still lay without life.

The lad was in a dead faint, and Hanwick attempted vainly to recover him; he leaned him against a tree, and his first call having procured no reply, he again shouted loud and frequent, until his voice rung like an echo through the solitary wood.

In a minute or two some one answered with—"Who calls?—where are you?"

"Deep in the wood to the west," replied Hanwick, and in a short space of time one of the under gardeners appeared at the spot.

The new-shovelled earth, and a body

extended

extended beside it, apparently dead, struck the man that murder had been committed, and that he was wanted to assist in concealing the corpse. He uttered an exclamation of affright, and was turning to fly, until reassured by Hanwick, he ventured to advance, and with surprise perceived that the prostrate form before him was his fellow-servant Henry.

Hanwick, in a few words, informed the man of the discovery which they had just made of a concealed grave, and desired him to hasten for more assistance to disinter completely the body.

The man gave a dismayed look at the grave, and needed no further injunction to hurry from the spot; but instead of searching for some of his fellow-labourers, he speeded to the house, and with staring eyes, and hair on end, told there what

what had happened, and what he had seen.

In a moment, as if by magic, the story was spread from the top to the bottom of the house. Mrs. Jiles sailed into her master's room, to be the first to inform him of the shocking discovery; and after her, in their hurry, astonishment, and terror, flocked all the other servants.

A new cause of confusion then occurred; they found Mr. Litchford extended on the floor in a state of insensibility, and so long did the fit continue, that a messenger had to be dispatched for a physician.

By this time, so quickly had the story spread, a crowd was gathered round Hanwick and Henry, and after rooting out the holly bush, an entire skeleton was exposed; but owing to the rude and hurried hands about it, it was completely disarranged, and laid beside its unhallowed

lowed grave, a shapeless heap of mouldering bones.

The physician lost not a moment in attending Mr. Litchford, who required to be bled before he shewed any symptoms of returning animation. When he did partly recover, he looked wildly around, and hurriedly said—" Who spoke to me?—who spoke of murder?" then without waiting to be answered, he made an effort to spring off his bed, and loudly cried—" Offended God, thy wrath comes!"

The physician, thinking to relieve his mind, told him succinctly what had happened; but the melancholy recital served only to throw Mr. Litchford into a more violent fit of frenzy than ever; he raved, and shrieked, and groaned, in the most appalling agony, dismaying his attendants with the state of horror in which his soul seemed to be plunged; yet at times

times melting them to tears with his sad and heart-rending cries for mercy! mercy!

Henry was also obliged to be put to bed; he was in a burning fever, and in his delirium he uttered such extraordinary accusations against Mr. Litchford, and lamented so constantly his murdered mother, that strange suspicions began to creep into people's minds; and several of the principal magistrates of the shire arrived at Rooverstane the following day, to examine into this mysterious discovery.

The appearance of Hanwick, as from the dead, added still more to the general surprise and consternation. He at once declared his marriage with Miss Litchford, and subsequent service in India, but denied, in the strongest and most positive terms, that Miss Litchford had ever fled with him, or that he had heard

heard of her from the day he had left his father's house for London, two and twenty years ago. Of the suspicions which had led him to dig in the wood he declined to give any explanation, until he should have a personal interview with Mr. Litchford; but he informed them of the fancies which had bewildered Henry's brain, and called them visions as unreal as those which arise in dreams.

Some, however, thought that Henry's grandfather should be sent for, to hear his statement of the matter; but before his arrival all was dreadfully explained.

Late in the evening of the second day from the discovery, Mr. Litchford expired, the most fearful and repentant sinner that ever lay on an earthly deathbed. In his last hours, during his intervals of reason, those who were around him gathered the following horrible

 facts:—

facts:—Mr. Litchford had ever been a most affectionate and indulgent father: his daughter was lovely in mind and in person; and he looked forward with fond anticipation to uniting her to a young man of rank, the son of an old friend of his, and one who promised fair to lend to high birth that lustre which ever should accompany it. Unfortunately however for these cherished plans, Mr. Litchford took into his house as a clerk, the son of a farmer, upon one of his neighbouring estates. This young man was uncommonly handsome, and gifted with an address which would have fascinated in a rank of life far superior to that to which he had been born.

When least expecting such a blow, Mr. Litchford discovered that an attachment subsisted between this Hanwick and his daughter: naturally of a hasty temper, the torrents of his wrath terrified

fied his conscious and gentle daughter; and while she, in her alarm, was too confused to know how she should act, her father went himself to farmer Hanwick; and by threats, entreaties, and perhaps bribes, prevailed on the old man to send his son to London, where, by Mr. Litchford's orders, the young man was secretly entrapped for East India service.

In getting clear of him, Mr. Litchford hoped that all danger was past to his daughter; but a new and more agonizing discovery awaited him. When Miss Litchford found that Hanwick was gone, the anguish of her grief betrayed her secret. In vain she exclaimed that she was married to Hanwick; Mr. Litchford with his foot spurned her from him; and, locking her up, told her, with an imprecation that made her shudder, that she should live a prisoner upon

bread and water every hour that he existed.

Once, as was before related, she escaped to the house of her nurse; but she was soon missed, and returned to her former captivity; while every creature in the household of Rooverstane pitied her, and would willingly have assisted her to get to Hanwick, whom they firmly believed to be her husband, had it been known whither he was gone.

The room in which Miss Litchford was confined, was close upon the library, divided from it only by a narrow passage: Mr. Litchford kept the keys of her prison himself, and frequently visited his unhappy captive, to pour upon her all the invectives with which disappointed pride and affection filled his heart. Miserable, yet still doting upon his daughter, the more he felt her power over his affections,

affections, the more bitterly did he accuse and revile her.

One evening, after hearing a piece of good news concerning the young man whom he had wished for his son-in-law, he hastened to his daughter, to vent, in her presence, all the anguish and disappointment which he felt. Again and again did Miss Litchford assure him that she was married to Hanwick; but as the ceremony had been performed by a poor curate, since dead, Mr. Litchford treated her assertions with the utmost contempt; and wound up to madness by the loss of Mr. Montague, and his daughter's constantly-avowed attachment to Hanwick, he scrupled not to call her by every opprobrious epithet that could be applied to the most abandoned of her sex, and cursed her through every hour she had yet to live. His imprecations on Hanwick were dread-

ful to hear. Miss Litchford, half dead with grief and terror, fell at his feet, and implored him to revoke his curses; her father attempted to spurn her from him, but she still clung to his knees, petitioning for mercy on herself and Hanwick.

That name, from her lips, added fresh frenzy to his rage; he reiterated his curses in such horrible terms, that Miss Litchford, driven frantic, suddenly let go her hold of her father's knees, and stretching her hands to heaven, piercingly exclaimed—"Hear him not, oh God! Thou knowest Hanwick is my husband! Bless him—bless him! oh my God!"

Reason fled for the moment Mr. Litchford's brain; he lifted up a chair that was by him, and furiously hurled it at his daughter. She sunk with a broken cry on the floor, and wrath kept her father from hastening immediately to her assistance. But as she still lay motionless

motionless before him, calmer thoughts succeeded, and brought with them some portion of wonted tenderness. He raised her in his arms, pale and drooping, like a broken lily, which we try in vain to fix steady again upon its stem.

All his efforts to recover her were vain—she never breathed more!

* * * * * *

Let us hasten over a scene so horrible, nor attempt to describe the agonies of a father, who saw his only and yet idolized child dead before him, by his own hand.

The blow must have struck Miss Litchford on the temple; and to her it probably was mercy, divided so far as she was from the chosen partner of her young and fond heart.

When her miserable father could think beyond the woful spectacle before him, self-preservation, that first law of human nature, roused him to attempt conceal-

ment of the dreadful deed which he had committed. He carried the body to a closet off the library, which he always kept locked; and as Miss Litchford's apartment would not be entered by the female attendant until morning, he had time—oh horrible time!—to meditate on what was done, and what means were to be used to avoid discovery.

It was in October, and the nights dark and moonless: Mr. Litchford waited until long after his household were retired to rest, when, putting a dark lantern in his pocket, he entered the closet where his daughter lay, and wrapping that dear unconscious form in a cloak, to hide the white garments, he bore it silently down stairs, trembling and starting at every footfall which he himself made.

Once out of the house, he hurried to a thick and solitary wood, at some little distance,

distance, where, seeking the deepest part, he laid down the body, until he went to procure the necessary implements to enable him to hollow out an unblessed grave for his beloved and unhappy victim.

Painful and fatiguing was that agonizing task; sweat and tears mingled upon his face in torrents; but desperation added tenfold strength to his exertions, and in a short time he had dug deep enough to hide the fair small form of his hapless daughter. He buried her—threw, with his own hand, the earth upon that sweet face which had wound itself round each fibre of his heart, and pressed down the rough and cold sods upon that tender frame, which, to have preserved from harm, he would have sacrificed himself.

Oh God! who can tell his feelings, as he prostrated himself on the newly-made

grave? or did he feel, or did despair overpower itself, and turn for a time its tortures into annihilation?

The next morning, Miss Litchford was missed; and in trembling fear her attendants informed Mr. Litchford of the supposed elopement: he heard them in ghastly silence—the spirit of self-preservation now satisfied, the mechanical impulse which had hitherto supported him, failed at once, and left him sunk in stupor next to insensibility.

For months he lay in this exhausted state; and when he partly recovered, by the advice of his physician, and at the solicitations of his friends, he visited the Continent, to endeavour to chase away the sickness and melancholy which overwhelmed him.

None knew that this consuming disease was of the mind, not the body: the elopement of Miss Litchford was never once

once doubted—her grave in the wood remained unnoticed—the falling of the autumnal leaves helping to conceal its slight mound, and heavy and immediately succeeding rains washing away the appearance of the new-shovelled earth which lay around it; and there was she to lie, unknown and unsuspected, until the inscrutable will of God was to bring this long-hidden guilt to light, and prove that the arm of Heaven, though it may appear to linger in the execution, is ever sure in its dart of retribution.

Mr. Litchford travelled in vain; and still more wretched, at being absent from the lonely and nameless grave, he hastened to return to Britain, to waste away, near the ashes of his daughter, in repentance, remorse, and sorrow, the remainder of his unhappy life.

The only earthly monument which Miss Litchford had, was a slip of holly

that her father cut from a bush, which, in days of infancy, she had used to call hers, and planted on her grave, previous to his departure for the Continent. It took root, and flourished above the mouldering heart of its former mistress; and by that simple memorial knelt the despairing sinner, while he paid his midnight visits of penitence, desolation, and agony.

Old Alton, who had been in great distress since the disappearance of his grandson, eagerly obeyed the summons to Rooverstane; and though all was explained before he arrived, concerning the grave in the wood, yet still curiosity, sharpened by the awful discovery, so singularly made, had many questions to put to him about his daughter, and what he really believed to have been her fate.

Alton answered, that it was too true that

that she had made away with herself; though the features of the body when found were much decayed and obliterated, yet the few garments which still hung round it, were instantly recognised by the family to have been hers; and no doubt of her death and suicide had ever been entertained in any mind, until the unhappy and groundless fancies of Henry had, in a manner, disturbed his brain, and sent him wandering from his home.

That poor lad, by the unremitting cares of Hanwick, who felt that their late adventure had drawn an interest between them beyond that of common friendship, gradually recovered his health, and ultimately succeeded in disengaging his mind from the visionary ideas which had so lately all but distracted it.

The heir of Mr. Litchford, with a generosity that did him honour, presented

sented Hanwick with a small estate of four hundred a-year; it was at some distance from Rooverstane; for in view of that place Hanwick felt that he never could hope for rest from the pangs of a fruitless recollection. He threw off his disguises; and though browned by torrid suns, and worn by hard services, he still shewed, in noble appearance, the remains of that beauty which had once won the heart of the lovely and high-born Miss Litchford. He took possession of his comfortable home; and then, with gentle but earnest affection, asked Henry to come and be his other arm to him.

Henry, who had pined in sorrow after their separation, clasped the kind and solitary hand extended to him, and with almost inarticulate emotion replied—"Yes, Hanwick, I will go with you: and when I cease to be as that other

arm

arm to you, I shall be, like it, no more to be seen on earth."

Alton, with mingled feelings of satisfaction and regret, parted from his young grandson, to resign him to the future care and protection of Hanwick; but the departure of Henry was only a removal, not a separation — every few weeks saw him a visitor at his grandfather's cottage: and the old man, gratified and soothed by the affectionate attentions he received from both, sank to rest, blessing the event that had led his deserted grandson to find a friend in the broken-hearted stranger.

Henry combatted and subdued his visionary and groundless notions; he admitted his mother' death, and mourned rationally for her fate. A father he never knew; but his adopted one, Hanwick, prevented his murmurs, and reconciled him to desire no other parent than

than what he was to him. And to Hanwick Henry was much: a sad and singular circumstance had made them acquainted; and the equally sad and singular destiny of each had united them in mutual sympathy and pity. As Henry advanced in life, a brighter fate spread over him; he was happy in the domestic ties he formed; and Hanwick, surrounded by manly gratitude and femimine tenderness, found the closing part of his existence happier than ever, since the short period of his rapturous but ill-fated love, he had hoped to experience again in this world.

END OF THE WOOD OF ROOVERSTANE.



A STORY OF EDGEWOLDE.



A STORY OF EDGEWOLDE.

CHAPTER I.

"LOVELY woods! no longer shall I stray through your walks, a sighing absent lover! no longer shall I seek ye, in the gloomy eve, to muse beneath your solitary shades, and dream I see and worship Clara! But be ye green and lovelier still, and fresher and more fragrant be your groves, that nature may welcome with delight the mistress that comes to reign over you and me!"

Such was the romantic soliloquy of the

the young bridegroom of Clara Rivers, as he wandered, lost in blissful thoughts and anticipations, through his lovely domain of Edgewolde, the last evening of his bachelor life there.

Delamere was possessed of wealth and fascination, yet he was by no means the choice of the lovely Clara's parents. He had been early deprived of an estimable mother, and his father, a gay and dissipated man, left the boy entirely to his own will, or if he influenced him at all, it was to wildness and mischief.

When he had passed the first period of his childhood, he was sent to a public school, where, perhaps once a year, he might be visited by his father, who, pleased with the external improvement of his son, troubled not himself to examine into his disposition or pursuits.

Luckily for young Delamere and his fortune, his father died when the lad

was

was about fifteen; and the guardians to whose care he was entrusted, proved themselves worthy and conscientious men.

So far as was in their power, they endeavoured to repair the culpable negligence of the deceased Mr. Delamere to his son; and in part they succeeded, for their young ward was sensible and good hearted, and wanted only steadiness and reflection to be all that his friends could have desired. But those two virtues, not all the lectures of his guardians, nor the resolutions of his own mind, could bring to take up their abode in his inconsiderate brain: the wild, thoughtless habits of his unregulated youth, still kept ground, even against the better judgment of himself; and bore testimony, in many an act of folly, to the pernicious example which his father had set before his young steps.

He

He travelled, as other young men of fortune do; and returned from the Continent as gay, as thoughtless, and as extravagant an heir, as ever entered on the possession of a fortune.

His guardians saw, with regret, the really good disposition, and superior abilities, of Delamere, obscured in this vortex of dissipation: he was not the selfish libertine that his father had been, but too much did he resemble him in expence, impetuosity, and carelessness of the world's opinion. Rich, courted, and generous, Delamere, when he got free of his guardians, found none else to trouble him with sage admonitions, and warning advices; but, surrounded with those as wild as himself, hurried on the path of folly, until Clara Rivers appeared before him, and shone his fair and redeeming star.

Although Clara's eyes were dazzled by

by the brilliancy of her lover, and blinded to his numerous foibles, if not to say errors, her parents clearly saw the faults of Delamere, and highly disapproved his conduct. His overtures for the hand of their daughter they would of themselves at once have refused; but Clara was secured in Delamere's favour, and her tearful eye, and blanching cheek, when they spoke of a rejection, prevailed so far, that they gave a reluctant promise to consent to their daughter's marriage with Delamere, at the end of another year, should he, in the interval, seriously abjure his follies, and amend his course of life.

Delamere, had they desired it, would have lived the year of probation in a hermit's cell, for the reward of Clara: horses, dogs, curricles, cards, dice, &c. were all hurled from him, and sent to the devil, without ceremony, by their late

late master and patron. He lived in the shadow of Clara, and near her the world had no temptation that could entice him away.

But though temptation assailed him not, fear, and apprehension, and jealousy, did. Although Clara's engagement was generally suspected, yet her delightful beauty, and enchanting manners, drew crowds of admirers after her, and many, wilfully blind, rushed into the despair of being rejected suitors. Amongst them was the earl of Lester: he had followed Clara before her acquaintance with Delamere; but, modest in his opinion of himself, timidity had hitherto restrained the avowal of his attachment, until her reported engagement to another aroused him from his reserve, and overcame every other feeling, but anxiety to know his fate.

He declared himself too late, not more

more to his own regret than to that of the parents of Clara: in lord Lester they beheld all they could have wished in a husband for their daughter. Noble, prudent, dignified, and correct, totally free from all the vices, and even follies of the age, he was a rare example of unstained manners and untainted morality, in a young man to whom wealth and power opened so many avenues of pleasure and indulgence.

Delamere trembled when he approached, for lord Lester was a man respected even by the most dissolute; and when he falteringly mentioned his fears to Clara, and she held out her faithful hand to him, with her angelic smile and blush, he sunk, in worshipping silence, at her feet, overwhelmed with the conviction, that he was unworthy of the preference which he had obtained over lord Lester.

Clara was indeed the fond confiding woman; she had heard of Delamere's faults, but her partial eyes had never beheld in him but perfection; and attached to him beyond the power of language to describe, she would have thought a throne, besides a coronet, that was not shared with Delamere, valueless and worthless.

At last, the long, long year of probation expired, and Delamere brought Clara home to Edgewolde, the most enraptured bridegroom, and the happiest bride, that had ever plighted their faith to each other.

In the corrected habits of Delamere, and the perfect felicity of Clara, her parents forgot that they had ever disapproved; and congratulated themselves, that they had not allowed their prejudices to interfere with the happiness of their daughter.

The

The earl of Lester, who resided in the neighbourhood of Edgewold, was also a well-pleased spectator of the reformation of his favoured rival; the rejection of his love had not injured his friendship; his mind was too noble to bear envy or pique, and wherever it was in his power, he befriended Delamere, for Clara's sake.

Delamere was not so generous; or perhaps his passions were more ardent, than the calm, subjected ones of lord Lester: he was likewise sensible of his lordship's superiority in all essential matters over him; and felt, with its real weight, the sacrifice which Clara had made, in every eye but her own, by rejecting the hand of lord Lester in his favour. He was, however, too much ashamed of these feelings to give them utterance; but he could not subdue them, nor be in lord Lester's presence,

without experiencing a disagreeable sensation, and a restless anxiety, lest Clara should ever be induced to draw comparisons betwixt them.

Delamere, in this respect, was really a self-tormentor: to rival, or even equal him, in Clara's estimation, was next to an utter impossibility; but he was conscious of his unworthiness to be beloved by a being so pure and good, and that conviction made him apprehensive and doubting, where he had reason to confide the most.

Soon after the birth of her second child, Clara was surprised by a visit from an old acquaintance of hers: this lady was one of those friends that young girls are so apt to make on their first outset in life. Seven years had passed since they had last met, and Clara in that time had looked back with a smile on many of the friendships which the wisdom

wisdom of fifteen had then deemed indissoluble; and on this one more particularly than all, for never were two more unlike than Caroline Halcot and Clara Rivers.

Miss Halcot had several years the advantage of Clara in age; and the latter, just from school, and charmed to be admitted amongst women, was easily bound captive to the insinuating wiles of her more experienced companion.

A violent friendship lasted between them for four months, when Miss Halcot married a foreign gentleman, and going abroad with him, Clara was rescued from an acquaintance that might have done her ill, but never good.

Miss Halcot had resided constantly on the Continent, until the death of her husband, a few months since, when she had almost immediately returned to her native country; and on her arrival, lost

not a moment in offering a visit to Mrs. Delamere for the summer.

The intimation surprised Clara, as madame D'Alghioni had sisters settled in life, and several near connexions, to whom it might have been supposed she would rather have given her first regards in her native land, than to one whose acquaintance with her had been little more than a childish dream.

Delamere was from home when her juvenile friend's letter arrived, and she had to answer it in his absence, as madame D'Alghioni had mentioned that she was waiting in London only for the reply.

When Delamere returned, a few days after, his wife informed him of the unexpected guest they were so soon to have. For the first time, Delamere showed some impatience at what she had done, but when Clara's voice saddened,

dened, as she regretted having displeased him, his fond caresses hastened to recall her wonted peace; and he attributed his transient vexation to the disappointment of a wish to take Clara on a tour through Wales that summer.

"You forget," said she, smiling, "that I have a little friend who will not allow me to leave home this summer."

"I certainly should not forget him," returned Delamere, gaily. "Well, between your two friends, you will be something of a prisoner."

"Be you but my gaoler, Delamere, and I shall not quarrel with captivity," said Clara, fondly. "Have you ever seen madame D'Alghioni?"

"Yes—I think I have," replied he, in a half-hesitating voice, and keeping down his eyes.

"Where?" asked Clara.

"Florence, or some where on the Con-

tinent," answered Delamere; "but really," and he started carelessly up, "I scarcely remember, it is so long since; and I saw there so many madames and signoras, that it would require the memory of a hundred united in one to remember them all. Where is your baby, Clara? Three days seem an age since I have seen him and little Cecil;" and throwing his arm round her waist, they went to look at the nursery.

Although Delamere might have forgotten many madames and signoras, yet a few still kept a not very creditable place in his memory; and madame D'Alghioni came to his recollection, if not as one of the frailest of women, yet as one of the most imprudent. At Florence he had met her, and for several months had worn her chains, with all that gallantry which a gay and thoughtless young man will devote to a handsome

some and coquettish married woman; until at last his attentions became so marked, and her partiality so obvious, that not even a Frenchman's *nonchalance* could longer slumber; and monsieur and Delamere measured swords together, as became men of honour upon such an occasion.

The Frenchman possessed the better skill, but contented himself with running Delamere through the arm, who, beginning to think the play too dear for the stake, assured monsieur that friendship of the most platonic nature was all that had ever subsisted between madame and him. Upon this declaration matters were amicably adjusted, and the two duellists walked arm-in-arm from the field, on the best terms possible.

In another week Delamere bid adieu to Florence, and the beautiful and partial madame D'Alghioni: he had pledged

his honour to her husband that he was only her friend, and to keep his word inviolate, he found no other assistance than flight.

Since then he had never seen madame D'Alghioni; but he had had many letters from her; and several times she had not scrupled to solicit the loans of considerable sums of money, to relieve her from the distress in which a jealous and cruel husband kept her. So she wrote; and Delamere, whatever he thought, granted her twofold the aid which she required.

Their correspondence had been rather warm, until Delamere saw and loved Clara Rivers; then it had languished into perfect coolness on his part; and when he married, he had dropped it altogether. The lady was more constant; and Delamere still continued to be honoured with her epistles, although very seldom,

seldom, compared to what he had once been. Her coming to visit his wife was not more unexpected than it was unwished for; nor did he approve of such a companion for his pure and guileless Clara; but aware that he could not expose madame D'Alghioni, without bringing to light some traits in his own conduct, which he wished to be forgotten or unknown, he was silent upon his unwillingness to receive her; and trusted to his own new rectitude and Clara's presence to make her visit of no evil consequences.

CHAPTER II.

MADAME D'Alghioni arrived; and both Delamere and his wife were at a loss to

 recognise,

recognise, in the pensive, mourning figure now before them, the gay, volatile person which they had formerly known her to be. She was just out of her first weeds, and the dress she wore was so becoming and interesting, that it was impossible to behold her without admiration: her manners seemed calmed down from their former levity, to the gentlest seriousness; and all unbecoming demeanour was banished from her conduct, as if it had never prevailed there. She charmed and delighted the unsuspicious Clara, who made Delamere agree with her in every thing that praised their beautiful and so happily altered guest.

Madame D'Alghioni could put on her dress as became her best; so could she her manners; but it cost her some pains to assume the character in which she wished to appear to Clara. She had left

left the Continent, with a broken reputation, and an embarrassed fortune: some reports, not in her favour, had already reached England; and as her relations were not exactly in the circle in which she was accustomed to move, to get a footing in some family of consequence and respectability was now of the utmost necessity to the support of her sinking fame. She flew to the recollection of her former intimacy with Clara Rivers, as the wife of the man with whom she had been so much talked of; if she could procure her countenance, scandal must stop its progress, and the purse of Delamere, which had before so largely assisted her, might again be made a help to her need. Such were the motives which had brought madame D'Alghioni to Edgewolde, and to secure her former influence over Delamere, her secret scheme; for knowing what

what his character had been on the Continent, she placed but little faith in his reformation: at all events, her circumstances were desperate; and if love failed in her service, she doubted not to be able to excite again that generosity which she knew so well he possessed.

One fault still adhered to Delamere; he could not bring himself to study economy; and the handsome but moderate establishment which he had set up on his marriage, gradually increased to a most expensive one. Clara saw with silent pain the needless innovations that were so frequently added to their expenditure; this observation was, however, carefully kept from the knowlege of her parents, as she too well remembered that extravagance had been one of their principal objections to Delamere. All other follies he seemed entirely to have given up; and doting upon Clara to devotion to her every

every look and wish, how could she bring herself to find fault with him whose voice to her was never but the accents of love and indulgence.

They had passed the first winter of their marriage in London; but by the second, Clara was happy that she was in a situation to make gaiety impossible, as their style of living while in town was more suited to the rank of a nobleman, than to that of a private gentleman.

Clara's being a nurse, and the most attentive of mothers, threw her husband and her guest frequently together. Unsuspicious as innocence itself, she insisted upon Delamere's driving out madame D'Alghioni every day; and when she did not accompany them, madame always chose a curricle, that Delamere could drive himself, to any other conveyance.

Shortly after her arrival at Edgewolde, lord

lord Lester came to the country; and as he had never before heard of madame D'Alghioni, along with every other one else, he admired the charming widow, and appeared much taken with her manners.

A hope of so noble a conquest made madame D'Alghioni still more captivating, and her conversation with his lordship was so full of interest, and so fascinating, that he came more frequently than ever to Edgewolde, nor wished to conceal how agreeable a companion he thought the fair guest there.

Delamere beheld him with a more dissatisfied eye than ever, for until his lordship had come, madame D'Alghioni had treated him in such a familiar, yet perfectly correct manner, that it was not in man not to feel the difference which she now made; and trifle though it was at the time to Delamere, still, as lord Les-

ter

ter was the cause of it, it added to his spleen against that already-sufficiently-disliked nobleman.

Lord Lester, however, was never in any danger of a serious captivation; he admired madame D'Alghioni's beauty and manners, but without any wish to appropriate them to himself; nor had his attentions any other desire than that of complaisance to a stranger, and above all, to the friend of Mrs. Delamere.

A few weeks afterwards, being in London, he chanced to hear madame D'Alghioni's name mentioned; and pursuing with some interest the subject, he heard reports, almost facts, of her conduct, that surprised and shocked him, that she should be a guest of Mrs. Delamere's. He did not hear Delamere's affair mentioned, but enough to convince him that she was a very improper person

person to be in the house with a young man, only just on his reformation.

When lord Lester appeared again at Edgewolde, his manner to madame D'Alghioni was so different from what it had hitherto been, that Clara remarked it, and felt hurt that he should behave to her guest in a way so inconsistent with his usual steadiness and good breeding.

Delamere, glad of an opportunity to vent his spleen against lord Lester, railed so much at him, that Clara, from the generosity of her heart, attempted to soften the censure of the absent, although it was awkwardly done, as madame D'Alghioni was present, who had of herself started the unpleasant subject.

Soon after Clara left the room, madame D'Alghioni, with a smile, said—"I see I must put up with lord Lester's

ter's cavalier treatment, in Mrs. Delamere's presence. However, I cannot feel offended by her preference; she ought to be grateful to him."

"Grateful!" said Delamere, indignantly; "it only did honour to lord Lester's heart and judgment to solicit Clara to grace his title."

"My dear friend," replied madame D'Alghioni, with much sweetness, "the beauty of Clara none ever beheld that did not admire; and her greatest charm is her delicacy in giving utterance to any expressions that might hurt or pain you."

"Hurt or pain me!" repeated Delamere, colouring.

"Yes," repeated madame D'Alghioni; "did you not observe with what sweet embarrassment she ventured to take lord Lester's part against our accusations? I quite admired her, stealing a timid

timid look at you, to know if you were offended by her defence of your rival."

Delamere's very forehead crimsoned: Clara had done all that madame D'Alghioni mentioned, and the word rival grated through his heart like a rack.

Madame appeared not to notice his discomposure, and challenging him to be her knight through the perils of the wood, went out with him to walk.

Lord Lester, who was not a friend by profession only, after ascertaining beyond a doubt, that the character of madame D'Alghioni was deservedly light, got his aunt, who resided with him, to discover this information to Clara, and to ask her what tie of friendship subsisted between them, to authorize the long visit which madame D'Alghioni proposed to make at Edgewolde.

The age and friendship of lady Jane Vernon required little apology for asking

ing these questions; and Clara as candidly told her the whole history of her juvenile intimacy with Caroline Halcot, for four months, and then its total break, until she came so unexpectedly upon her as a visitor.

Lady Jane expressed herself happy to learn, that the tie between them was so slight; and then gently proceeded to relate to her astonished auditor what the character of the lady really was; and counselled her, as a friend, to get rid of her guest as soon as possible.

Clara listened to her in utter amazement, and seemed inclined to doubt that her ladyship had suffered her credulity to be imposed on by false or malicious information.

"No," replied lady Jane, "I am not misinformed—I came not with my own knowledge of the lady's fame, but with that of one who neither listens to falsehood,

hood, nor to malice, and who feels towards you the regard of a brother. Be assured, such an errand had never been mine, had a doubt remained of the intelligence I bring you: your mother is far off, that could best advise you in such a case, and in our friendship for you, you must pardon this interference. Again, I caution you not to harbour madame D'Alghioni long at Edgewolde; but the quieter such an affair is managed the better; and since you are warned of her character, leave it to time either to expose or amend it."

Lady Jane Vernon's relation left Clara unhappy and irresolute: for the last week there had been an irritation in Delamere's manner towards her, which, though evidently attempted to be concealed, could not escape the notice of one accustomed to such undisguised tenderness as she was.

Delamere

Delamere and madame D'Alghioni had become quite inseparable; they were for ever riding or driving about togegether in his curricle; and although Clara was not yet aware of it, they were already begun to be talked of in the neighbourhood, which had hastened lord Lester in desiring that Clara should be informed of the character of the guest she was cherishing; yet without bringing to her knowledge the unfavourable reports that were already but too widely circulating, of her husband and her fancied friend.

While Clara was yet musing, in sad and unsettled thought, her waiting-woman came to tell her, that a person wished to see her below.

"Unless it be upon particular business," said Clara, "I would rather not see any one just now: do, Burdon, tell the person so."

"Ma'am,"

"Ma'am," replied the maid, "it is farmer Robinson: he asked for my master; and when he was told that he was out, he requested to see you, as he had come some miles about, on business with my master."

Clara went down stairs immediately; she knew the man, and affably accosted him: the farmer's business was to pay to Delamere a sum of money, which he had borrowed of him at the last fair.

Clara gave him a receipt, and ascending again to her apartment, remained there until she heard the voices of her husband and her visitor, returning from their walk. She approached the window, and beheld them through the blind; madame D'Alghioni, as usual, leaned upon Delamere's arm; her scarf was thrown across his other, and he carried for her a large bunch of wild flowers,

ers, which they had gathered together in the woods.

They entered straight into the house, but some time elapsed before Delamere sought his wife, while she, in the interval, had leisure to reflect on the time, when, had her voice not been the first to greet him on his return home, even from the shortest absence, he would have sought her as anxiously as if they had been weeks separated.

When he did come up to her dressing-room, Clara gave him the money which farmer Robinson had left with her, and gently requested of him a few of the notes, to pay a small bill which she had had just sent her from the village.

"Let it lie over," said Delamere; "I cannot spare any at present."

"I wish you could," returned Clara. "It is widow Marlow, and she is too

poor to be kept long out of her money."

"Upon my soul, Clara, you think of every body's wants but mine!" rejoined Delamere, quickly; "I have bills of a yard long lying by me; and I must settle them before I can attend to your threads, and tapes, and needles."

He abruptly quitted the room, with the bunch of notes in his hand; and Clara, struck to the heart with the unkindness of his manner, threw her head on the table, and gave way to a flood of bitter and impetuous tears. No one came near to disturb her, until her maid, at the usual hour, appeared to assist her to dress for dinner.

When she descended to the drawing-room, madame D'Alghioni was already in it, seated upon a couch, and Delamere at her feet, on a low ottoman, holding a little ivory reel, off which she

was

was winding silk. His hands were familiarly resting on her knee, but the moment Clara entered, he snatched them off with a quickness that snapped the thread in madame D'Alghioni's hand, and sprung up in evident embarrassment from his disgraceful posture.

Clara saw the sudden start of Delamere, and for the first time a suspicion of her husband and her guest arose in her guileless and throbbing heart. She walked up the room with a pale and downcast countenance; she felt unable to speak, and a conscious and confused silence reigned over the other two.

A gentleman visitor being announced, relieved them all from the disagreeable situation in which they were; but madame D'Alghioni alone recovered her usual ease, to converse with him: Delamere was constrained in his attempts to be cheerful, and Clara's heart was too

artless to know how to smile while it was breaking.

It was in vain that Clara tried to recollect that she sat at the head of her own table—she could scarcely assume the merest forms of politeness; in the thought of Delamere's inconstancy, every other consideration vanished, and a thousand instances, which she had hitherto, in the purity of her mind, considered only as the attentions due from Delamere to his guest, crowded to her memory, to prove his partiality to madame D'Alghioni, and the simple blindness with which she had so long witnessed this undermining of her happiness.

When she ventured to look round the table, Delamere's eye sunk beneath hers; but madame D'Alghioni's dark glances rolled in brilliant confidence on all, and she addressed the silent Clara

in

in the same unembarrassed strain of gaiety that marked her discourse to the gentlemen.

At dinner, madame D'Alghioni's seat, when it was a family party, was always next to Delamere; and with a playful manner, which none so well as she could carry off, she always filled his glass herself, and laughed, with witching sportiveness, as he attempted, at her orders, to carry the bumpers, which she poured him out, without spilling, to his lip.

At first Clara was amused with the playfulness of her guest; but long before the present time, she had done all she could politely do to put a stop to it; for madame carried her gaiety too far, and was so constantly filling Delamere's glass, that if he did not rise from table inebriated, he was, at least, always elevated.

Clara hinted this to her guest; but

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him an additional glass, tha
him of one; and in the eveni
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with him, at which he always
ever tried to win.

When the ladies retired to
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father had that day placed in h

The remainder of the eveni

drawing-room, until she heard the gentlemen ascending from their wine: Delamere, owing to madame D'Alghioni's assistance, and the company of a stranger, and probably to a wish to get rid of his own disagreeable reflections, seemed more than usually affected by what he had drunk. He was now as gay as during dinner he had been depressed; and madame D'Alghioni began a rallying conversation with him, which, though it drew a great deal of gallantry to herself, was not altogether marked with that respect which should have appeared in a more sober mood.

Clara, who was a charming performer, was solicited by Mr. Penworth to move to the piano: gladly would she have declined complying, but her denials were overpowered, and Delamere, with all his usual tenderness, led her to the instrument, and appeared to wish

to remain beside her; but madame D'Alghioni, touching from behind, slily showed him a pack of cards, with such an arch and alluring look, that Delamere could not refuse the summons, and went with her to a sofa, where, drawing toward them a little table, they commenced playing piquet.

Clara disappointed Mr. Penworth; she could not collect herself to play well, and her fingers seemed only to echo the discord that was in her heart. They soon left the piano, and went to overlook the card-players; madame D'Alghioni's gold purse was lying beside her, filled almost to the brim; and Delamere held his cards so open, and played with so little care, that Mr. Penworth, in a very dry manner, said —"You seem a favourite of Fortune's to-night, madame."

"And I a very step-child," said Delamere,

lamere, gaily; "this fair favourite turns fortune ever against me."

"If you generally play as you do to-night," replied Mr. Penworth, "I am inclined to think you throw yourself out of her good graces; but with such an antagonist, a man's wits may well be supposed to lose their sway."

Madame D'Alghioni turned her dark eyes full on Mr. Penworth. He was a bachelor, verging towards fifty, and met the brilliant shock unmoved; besides, he had heard the reports which were beginning to be in circulation concerning Delamere and madame D'Alghioni, and coming to Edgewolde that day, with an awakened and noticing eye, he thought he had beheld sufficient to assure him that madame was possessed of too much levity, and Delamere of too much gallantry, to be entirely indebted to rumour for the remarks that were

making on their behaviour to each other.

Madame D'Alghioni laid down her cards, and laughingly said—"Spectators should be abolished.—Were we true gamblers, Mr. Delamere, we should interdict on-lookers at our game."

"That would be selfish," said Mr. Penworth; "spectators often profit by remarking the game of others.—What say you, Mrs. Delamere? don't you think it might be of use?"

"At times, sir, I believe it might," replied Clara, faintly.

The plaintive tone in which she spoke attracted the regard of Delamere; he looked quickly at her, and said—"Good God, Clara, are you ill? you look quite pale!"

He rose from his chair, and approached her with much solicitude; she put her hand upon her eyes, to hide her agitation, as she answered him—"Nothing

thing is the matter; only a slight headache."

Madame D'Alghioni closed her overflowing purse, and dropped it into her reticule. She felt no inward complacency; there was a point in Mr. Penworth's expressions, which, though hidden under the garb of simple remarks, she was too clever not to understand; and the silence and disorder of Clara, she doubted not, had their source from some newly-awakened observation on her conduct.

CHAPTER III.

When Clara retired for the night, she endeavoured to consider what would be the best method of profiting by lady

Jane Vernon's disclosure. She had intended to communicate it immediately to her husband; but the events of the afternoon caused her now to hesitate in that purpose, lest jealousy should be supposed to have made her suspicious and unjust. Besides, she feared now to mention it to Delamere: how would he receive such account of the woman to whom she dreaded he was but too partial, and coming, above all, through a channel which Clara knew he disliked?

Bathed in tears, she thought over all these unpleasant reflections; and though she did not approve her own decision, she was too timid to come to any other resolution than to preserve silence to Delamere on all she had heard and might suspect, and endeavour to give madame D'Alghioni reason to understand, by the coldness and change of her manner towards her, that she was

no

no longer a welcome guest at Edgewolde.

Clara's parents were at present in Italy, whither they had lately gone for the recovery of the health of their only son; and, except one uncle, she had no other near relative in England: she was in a manner completely thrown upon the attention of her husband, and until very recently, she had never missed another friend.

She laid her head on the pillow, with a feeling of loneliness hitherto unknown to her; and her heavy and sleepless heart seemed, with painful throbs, to warn her, that the world was about to throw off the delightful mask with which it had as yet dazzled her inexperienced eyes.

The next morning madame D'Alghioni met her, smiling and gay as if yesterday had never been. Clara was

cold

cold and distant in vain; her guest would not perceive it, but made her deportment warmer than ever to her lovely and withdrawing hostess.

Lord Lester called in the course of the morning, and his demeanour was most chilling to madame D'Alghioni. She was equally blind to his reserve, and chatted to him with the most lively ease imaginable.

Lord Lester replied to her by monosyllables, until at last, utterly provoked with her well-bred assurance, he turned sharply round, and staring her in the face, said—"Madam, when I was last in town, I heard some of your friends talking of you: they were on their way to Florence, and seemed much to regret that they should no longer have your *kind* reception there. For my part, I own it astonishes me, that you should have left the charming acquaintance you possessed

possessed in that luxurious climate, for the chilling influence of an English matron's society."

He spoke with such marked irony in his tone, that not all madame D'Alghioni's effrontery could support her against it: not a blush, but a deep glow of anger, confusion, and mortification, crimsoned her whole countenance: for a moment, she was silent and confounded; then rising up, she turned to lord Lester, and with malicious and significant meaning, said—"My lord, if my absence from this room was so much desired, a more polite method might have been taken to accomplish it; but I see that lord Lester, like most of his sex, has no patience where his inclinations are thwarted."

Whatever was marked in lord Lester's words, was equally so in madame D'Alghioni's; he saw and felt the malice

of

of her intention; but before he could reply to it, she had hurried from the room; while Clara, whose colour had varied during every moment of the altercation, felt now ready to sink to the earth. Lord Lester observed her distress, and nearly as much disordered himself, stood for a few minutes in silent embarrassment, until recollecting that madame D'Alghioni was not to be allowed to triumph in her malignant insinuation, he snatched up his hat, and in the moment of departing, said—"Friendship has carried me too far, Mrs. Delamere—I have committed a rudeness in your house, for which I know not how to apologize, unless you can find an excuse in good but rash intention. I fear to be denied pardon at present; but some time hence you will perhaps remember the motives that induced me to offend, and grant me your forgiveness." He wished

wished her good morning; the faint voice of Clara scarcely able to return his adieu.

The conscience of madame D'Alghioni had told her, from the first, the reason of lord Lester's changed behaviour towards her; but she was at present so completely embarrassed, that she could not think of leaving Edgewolde, nor give up the aids of Delamere's purse, which, very soon after her arrival at his house, she had made largely answer her exigencies.

Upon leaving Clara and his lordship, she had flown in search of Delamere; and being directed to what part of the grounds he was in, she had hurried to him, and drawing him from the labourers he was overlooking, she led him to a retired walk, and there, in artful tones and tears, related lord Lester's conduct, in

in the light that suited best with her own ends.

Delamere, naturally impetuous, and disposed to object to lord Lester, scarcely heard her through, when he swore that his lordship or he should shed their heart's blood ere night; but madame D'Alghioni, who could not yet afford to lose, or to leave Delamere, exclaimed—"No, Delamere, it is my quarrel, and you shall not embroil yourself for me; besides, the remembrance that lord Lester was once a lover of your wife's, might lead to unpleasant surmises, should any violence take place between his lordship and you, and give rise to suspicions, that would be highly unjust and injurious to Clara, who, although she may admire, and perhaps regret lord Lester, has not, I am sure, a thought beyond her vows to you. Be calm then, I conjure you, dearest Delamere! seek not rashly, and

without

without cause, to put yourself into danger; for remember there is one, at least, who could not survive you!" and as she concluded, she fell upon his shoulder and wept aloud.

Delamere mechanically supported her. Clara regretting lord Lester, told, in anguish, to his heart, how poor would be the degrading love of another, for the pure and hallowed attachment of his wife.

When he separated from madame D'Alghioni, he went in search of Clara, hurt, grieved, and irritated by the treacherous recital and insinuations of his artful guest. Clara, as she heard the well-known step of her husband approaching her chamber, endeavoured to dash away her tears, and turned her head from him as he entered, that he might not perceive her disordered countenance.

Delamere construed the action differently;

ently; and when he saw the traces of tears on her face, he fancied she had been shedding them for lord Lester. Pride kept him back from openly avowing his jealousy; but his passion was too much raised to be entirely concealed, and with much acrimony he demanded why madame D'Alghioni had been so ill-treated by her and lord Lester?

Clara, who had expected this question, from the manner in which madame D'Alghioni had quitted the drawing-room, had been ruminating on what answer to make to it, and deciding that now or never was the time to disclose to Delamere the unfavourable light that their guest was held in by the world, she timidly replied to his angry interrogations—"Lady Jane Vernon does not, I believe, much respect madame D'Alghioni?"

"Lady Jane Vernon!" interrupted Delamere,

Delamere, loudly; "and pray what has lady Jane Vernon to do with the guests of this house? Is it because madame D'Alghioni is young and lovely, that lady Jane Vernon has found out she dislikes her? It can be for no other cause, as she never leaves Lester House."

"But she hears much beyond it," said Clara; "and——"

"What does she hear?" demanded Delamere, colouring: "like other old cats, she collects all the scandal around her, and then edifies you with it."

"Oh, Delamere!" said Clara, tears springing to her eyes, "you know I do not listen to scandal; and lady Jane Vernon is the most benevolent of women: if she were not sure of her information, she would never have mentioned to me any thing unfavourable of madame D'Alghioni."

"Indeed!" said Delamere, sarcastically;

cally; "and who told her amiable ladyship this charitable story with which she has been amusing you?"

"It was no story," replied Clara; "it was merely to advise me that madame D'Alghioni was spoken of too lightly to be the companion of so young a woman as I am."

"And was lord Lester pointing out the same impropriety to you?" asked Delamere, with flashing eyes.

"No," replied Clara, with rising colour, at the meaning tone with which the question was put.

"No!" repeated Delamere, passionately. "Sanctified hypocrite! he chooses to creep beneath the cowardly shelter of a petticoat, and cants, from behind fringes, of character and propriety! But, by Heaven! if any more interferers come to Edgewolde, I will unmask one at least of his borrowed speciousness, and show

him

him to the world in his own false colouring!"

"Oh, Delamere," cried Clara, flinging herself on his breast, "you injure lord Lester!"

The clasp of Clara's arms went to Delamere's heart; it softened, and his own arms were folding around her; but the instant she uttered lord Lester's name, he started from her embrace, and flinging her from him, exclaimed, with fury in every look and tone — "Eternal curses blast lord Lester! In my very arms do you plead for him! Weep, weep! your chains are fixed!"

He rushed instantaneously from the room, and not knowing where he went, entered the library, and threw himself distractedly along one of the sofas.

Madame D'Alghioni, who had half expected this disturbance, from the irritated state in which Delamere had left her,

her, had lingered until now on the stairs; and the moment she saw him issue in disorder from his wife's apartment, she stole softly after him, and approaching him where he lay lost in agitation, she gently took his hand, and with tender solicitation inquired the cause of his discomposure.

"Oh God!" groaned Delamere, "I have been a brute to Clara!"

"How!" said madame; "did you strike her?"

"Srike her!" echoed Delamere, starting up—"strike Clara! Sooner would I strike to my own heart! Oh, Clara, Clara!"

"What, you have had some words then," said madame D'Alghioni. "I was absolutely afraid you had committed murder, from your doleful air. Pray what did you dream matrimony to be? a gentle way of roses only? Leave Clara to her own

own humour: she may think of another for a while; but finding her wandering thoughts in vain, she will dutifully call them back to their allegiance to you, and forget lord Lester."

"Damn lord Lester!" passionately exclaimed Delamere. "Why do you eternally revert to his hated name?"

"Because I am your friend," replied madame D'Alghioni, "and wish to teach you a little of that stoical philosophy which every married man ought to learn. You the gay Delamere I knew at Florence! Impossible! He was a gallant fellow, that made love to every man's wife, and more seemingly versed in the world than ever to mind the passing *penchans* of his own."

"Cease, cease!" interrupted Delamere: "I had no wife then—I knew not the world contained a Clara."

"It is now my turn to cry 'cease,

cease!" said madame D'Alghioni, softly laying her hand upon his mouth. "How often, recreant, did you swear to me, that the world had never made my equal? Ah, traitor! you have nothing to say in defence of those treacheries! Yours were true lover's vows, and mine was a true woman's heart to believe them, and remember them."

Her voice faltered as she concluded, and her dark eyes turned upon Delamere's, suffused with tears of tenderest reproach.

"You have remembered me better than I deserved," said Delamere, speaking beneath the chiding fingers which he pressed in ardent gratitude to his lips. "Ah, Caroline, I believe you are the truest friend I possess."

"Be convinced of it," said madame D'Alghioni, with fervent emphasis; "for

"for had I not been so, I had never come to Edgewolde."

She hid her face, as if in shame of the disgraceful avowal; but she had wilily chosen her time to make it, when Delamere's keen feelings were openest to her beguiling flattery, and his warm and unsuspicious heart readiest to be soothed and won upon by her enticing blandishments.

CHAPTER IV.

CLARA was no longer the first object of Delamere's attention: madame D'Alghioni reigned now over him, and over Edgewolde; and Clara found that her cold behaviour and withdrawn famili-

arity were alike unheeded by her smiling and confident rival.

Of that aggravating knowledge she could no longer be ignorant, and she saw madame D'Alghioni squandering away Delamere's money in pounds, while she could scarcely command as many shillings of it.

She first discovered that fact in going to the village a day or two after Delamere had refused her money to discharge a bill with there. Madame D'Alghioni had obtruded her company in the carriage with Clara, saying she had some purchases to make, and in paying for them, she laid a bunch of notes on the counter.

Clara's eyes lighted by mere chance upon them, and her sensations may be supposed, when she discovered it to be the same which she had given to Delamere from farmer Robinson.

She

She felt she could not be mistaken, as the wrapping note had borne the pen-marks of a ridiculous head, and that rude sketch was the first thing that now presented itself to her sight.

Her eyes grew dim, and a cold sickness rushed over her frame, as she sunk, nearly fainting, on a chair.

No one observed her; and whilst madame D'Alghioni folded up her purchases, and dropped her change into her well-filled purse, Clara, pallid as death, made an excuse to the shop-woman for not paying her little bill, which did not amount to a third of what madame D'Alghioni had expended.

From that day, Clara's heart was breaking; and though Delamere observed the sad change in her lovely countenance, yet fancying himself the aggrieved person, he would not appear to notice it; although, except when lulled by the

 witcheries

witcheries of madame D'Alghioni, he was wretched at his coldness with his wife, and distracted in the belief that Clara was now regretting and comparing the happy lot which she might once have shared with lord Lester.

The conduct of Delamere and madame D'Alghioni became, ere long, the talk and condemnation of the whole country; and several ladies hinted to Clara, that the sooner she got quit of her guest, the better it would be for herself, and the more agreeable to those who came to visit her.

Clara heard them in silence; of Delamere she would not complain, and she was ashamed to say, that she was now but a cipher in her own house.

Lady Jane Vernon pitied Clara, along with every one else; but seeing that Mrs. Delamere rather avoided meeting her, she forbore seeking her, and both she

she and lord Lester became strangers at Edgewolde.

A bill, much about this time, was sent to madame D'Alghioni; it had been long due, and threats were now held out, that she feared would be put into execution, if the money was not immediately forthcoming. Madame was not burthened with shame; she knew it to be in vain to apply to Delamere in her present exigencies, as not a week before, she had drained him of almost his last guinea; and notwithstanding the contemptuous manner with which lord Lester had treated her, she applied in the following strain to him.

"MY LORD,

"As you seem so very well versed in my affairs, this little billet of mine will not, I suppose, excite your

astonishment, knowing, as you do, that Fortune has not showered her favours upon me with a lavish hand. I have also heard of you, and in terms of such merit, that I dare venture to solicit from you the loan of seventy pounds, which is absolutely necessary for me at present.

"I trust lord Lester has gallantry enough to preserve a lady's secret. I am,

"MY LORD,

"Yours, with esteem,

"C. D."

To this note madame D'Alghioni received the following reply.

"MADAM,

"You were mistaken in supposing that I should not be astonished at having

having the honour of your correspondence; but under the belief, and I must say hope, that the money you require is to be applied to the expences of your immediate departure from Edgewolde, I inclose a bill for the sum you require.

"I have the honour to be

"MADAM,

"Your obedient servant,

"LESTER."

Madame D'Alghioni smiled as she read it, and throwing it into the fire, put the bill carelessly up in her purse. —"I shall be once more your correspondent, my haughty lord," thought she: "if I could bring you out of your ice——" A glow of triumph thrilled through her heart at the golden idea, and snatching up her pen, she wrote thus:

"MY LORD,

"Words are more explanatory than writing—an interview would better explain your half-expressed wishes.

"When I tell you that your present relieved me from real difficulty, I believe to your generous heart that will be thanks sufficient; but if you want more, come hither and receive them.

"C. D."

She sealed this billet tastefully up, and went down stairs, to drop it into the letter-bag, which one of the servants carried every day to the village post-office. She was too late; the footman was gone; and Delamere at that instant entering the hall, invited her to go and play a game of billiards with him. In some trepidation of being seen, she quickly and hiddenly dropped the note into

into her reticule, and then putting her arm in his, accompanied him to the billiard-room.

She was in high luck, winning constantly; until at last Delamere's pocket being exhausted, he, in a sportive manner, snatched up her reticule, to rob her, as he said.

Madame recollected the note to lord Lester, and in the utmost alarm threw down her cue, and flew round the table, to regain her reticule from Delamere.

Her anxiety could not pass unnoticed. —"What secret is here?" cried he; "mine it shall be as well as yours;" and as he now treated her with much less ceremony than he had ever done his wife, he held her back, and, with the greatest assurance, opened the bag, and shook its contents on the floor.

Madame D'Alghioni attempted to break from him, and to catch the note;

but Delamere, awakened now to a conviction that there was really some secret it was not intended he should know, still kept her back, and darted forward and seized the note—"Lord Lester!" exclaimed he, with flashing eyes and rising colour.

"Give it me, Delamere," cried madame D'Alghioni, struggling in vain to extricate it from his grasp; "oh, give it to me, Delamere, and I will account for it to you!"

Delamere answered not, but tore open the seal, and glanced like lightning over the contents.

The look he cast upon madame D'Alghioni made her shrink back in terror; then, as a last resource, she sunk upon her knees before him, and tremblingly articulated—"Delamere, will you swear to be secret, and I will explain to you the meaning of that note?"

"Spare

"Spare yourself that trouble," replied Delamere, in a rage that had calmed his voice with its own violence; "I can interpret myself—and if I should be stupid enough to require an explanation, I shall have lord Lester's before I sleep."

He motioned to quit the room; but madame D'Alghioni clung to his knees, in a way that he could not break through, and in the terror of detection, exclaimed —"No, Delamere, you must not seek one from lord Lester! It is nothing, if you will but listen—the note is not mine!"

"Not yours!" repeated Delamere, his cheek blanching from the darkest crimson to ashy pale.

"Listen! hear me!" resumed madame, in an imploring voice. "That note I got under the promise of inviolable secrecy! Oh, Delamere! if you discover that you have seen it, you will ruin

ruin me as well as Clara, and both innocent!"

"Innocent!—and from Clara!" exclaimed Delamere, in a voice scarcely heard through contending emotions; "from Clara! Heaven and earth! and do I stand tamely here?"

"You must trample on me, if you pass!" cried madame D'Alghioni, in despair. "If you do not mean that I should die at your feet, hear me!—if you have mercy, hear me!"

"Rise from that posture," said Delamere, assisting madame D'Alghioni from the floor, with a trembling hand; "I was beside myself to suffer you to retain it so long. Speak—tell me my disgrace! I will bear it as I will avenge it—like a man."

"You rash doubter," said madame, resting on his shoulder, and faintly smiling through her unfeigned tears, "what madness

madness are you dreaming of?—the babe, whose cradle Clara watches, is not more pure than she is."

"And write that note to lord Lester?" said Delamere, with agonized scorn.

"Delamere, you are such a creature of impulse, that without a friend to guide you, you would destroy yourself, and all who best loved you. Listen to this simple story, and then laugh at yourself. Amongst the last times that Clara was in company with lord Lester, the conversation, as it often does, turned upon the scarcity of money, and Mrs. Delamere, in a playful manner, totally free, she assured me, from all meaning, expressed a wish that she were in the possession of Fortunatus' cap, that she might wish herself in a gold mine, to help her through her present exigencies. The following day, when

when she had forgotten the circumstance, she received a packet from lord Lester, inclosing a splendid gold purse, containing notes to the amount of a hundred pounds, and a polite letter, requesting her acceptance of the trifling gift, and regretting he had not the wished-for cap to offer her. Clara—you know she is young and guileless—received the present as from a brother; and had that note sealed to send to him, when I, by chance, entered her dressing-room this morning: she showed me her present, and a copy of the note she had just written. Ah, Delamere, you had taught me the danger of a married woman corresponding with a man, and receiving gifts from him. I did not speak to Clara from my own fatal experience; but I told her that the world, which she as yet knew so little of, would blame her for accepting money from

from a young man so unconnected to her as lord Lester; and I cautioned her against entering into a correspondence that might involve her peace, or at least lead to suspicions which neither lord Lester nor she deserved. Clara was confounded at the new light I opened to her; she returned lord Lester's present, and implored me, by every thing sacred, to guard the circumstance from every body's knowledge, particularly from yours. Good God, Delamere! if you are so mad as to seek any quarrel with lord Lester, will not Clara suppose that I kept the note on purpose to betray it to you? It fell into my possession, only through the nurse and the baby entering the room at the moment I held it in my hand; and to keep it free of all other eyes, I dropped it in my reticule, nor thought of it again until you seized the bag."

"And

"And this is Lord Lester's morality!" exclaimed Delamere. "Damnable hypocrite! Oh, I will so unveil him, that his infernal head shall be set up as a mark to hoot at!"

"Not now, Delamere!" cried madame D'Alghioni, in an agony of supplication. "Oh, Delamere, be silent! think what I have sacrificed for you, and sacrifice this causeless moment of irritation for me! You could not seek lord Lester without exposing all that I have told you; and Clara, innocent as she is, would suffer in reputation by such madness; while I should be looked upon as a monster who had betrayed her to slander, and you to the risk of your life. Delamere, if you think I have sacrificed any thing to you, let this affair sink into the oblivion it merits!—again, on my knees, I conjure you not to mention this to lord Lester

or

or to Clara!—will you, Delamere, be my death?"

The distraction of madame D'Alghioni was real; it was in utter desperation that she had framed this monstrous falsehood of Clara. If Delamere persisted in seeking lord Lester, she was ruined either way; but if he believed her story, she might still, at least for a time, be safe beneath the shelter of Delamere's liberal hand.

No man, deceived as Delamere was, could have resisted the beauty and tears of madame D'Alghioni at his feet; he was obliged to yield to her prayers and caresses, and to promise silence upon this insult of lord Lester to his wife; but while he did so, he swore that it should be his daily endeavour to draw another quarrel with lord Lester, that should terminate but with the life of either.

Delamere,

Delamere, after this, gave himself up more than ever to madame D'Alghioni; he flew from the thoughts of himself and Clara, and applying to intoxication for forgetfulness, became, in that state, the very slave of his false, but fascinating guest. Her character was now so notorious, that all the ladies dropped her acquaintance; and when they met Delamere and her, for separate they were now scarcely ever seen, they averted their heads, and passed them without recognition of either. The graver part of the gentlemen met them with a distant bow, and even the gayest men began to look cold upon Delamere, for his scandalous conduct to a wife, whose charming beauty was not more admired, than her excellence in every female virtue was respected.

CHAPTER V.

DELAMERE, whose heart was the seat of feeling, although perverted, felt to the core this change in his acquaintance, and vainly strove to drive from his recollection the warm and cordial salutation he had used to meet with, from the respectable part of society, when his lovely and virtuous Clara was by his side; and the happy man he then was, contrasted with the miserable and degraded being he now so bitterly felt himself to be. Home—that once delightful home—what was it now to him, but the abode of wretchedness, guilt, and sorrow?

Clara, like a pale spectre of departed loveliness, shrunk almost from every human

human face, except the two unconscious pledges of her disastrous union; and every smile they now gave her, was as a dagger to her breaking heart. Her disposition was formed by sensibility; kindness and attention drew forth all the enchanting animation that was natural to her; but when coldness or neglect was offered to her, it fell like the chill blight on a delicate flower, that the sun revives, but the rough blast kills.

In writing to her parents, she had never touched upon the sad alteration in her husband: a sort of shame prevented her from acknowledging to them, that their disapprobation of her choice had not been without just cause: she had no friend near her to apply to, for apprehending that Delamere was jealous of lord Lester, she avoided all intercourse with lady Jane Vernon, and there was no other but her to whom she would

would have mentioned the subject; and only of madame D'Alghioni even to her. Delamere was still her sole idol; and though her heart might sigh at his unkindness, her lips had never yet framed themselves into a complaint. Rather than be from beneath the roof that sheltered him, she was willing to bear all his injustice and estrangement, until death, with a kinder hand, took her to his unchanging bosom.

Immediately after his correspondence with madame D'Alghioni, and much to her desire and satisfaction, lord Lester quitted the country, execrating the conduct and infatuation of Delamere, and beseeching his aunt, at parting, to befriend Clara, whenever it lay in her power.

Lady Jane Vernon would have gladly done so in every instance, but in the present case, Clara so evidently avoided her, and Delamere was so pointedly cold,

cold, that, without absolute intrusion, she could not present herself at Edgewolde; and Mrs. Delamere was now seldom or never to be met with any where else. Her unfortunate situation was, however, the universal theme of commiseration; and several times it was debated amongst the elder part of the neighbourhood, whether it should not be mentioned to Delamere, the opprobrium his conduct was bringing upon himself, and the contempt and indignation with which it was inspiring all around.

An old gentleman, who was in a manner the patriarch of that part of the country, undertook to speak to Delamere on the subject. He did it as gently as possible; and the deep-flushing cheek and quivering lip of his auditor led the friendly reprover to hope that his

his total perversion from good was not yet wholly accomplished.

Delamere, from the first moment that the subject was introduced, had remained in dead silence, with his arms folded tightly across his breast, and his eyes steadfastly fixed on the carpet.

Mr. Richland often paused, in expectation of a reply, and as often renewed his discourse, disappointed; until at last he finished a tolerably long and most excellent advice, which had, towards the end, in the heat of his feelings, rather assumed the strain of a lecture. Still he received no answer; and hurt at the little regard paid to him, he rose to depart, saying—"I see, Mr. Delamere, I am considered as a meddler—not as a friend."

"Sir," answered Delamere, "I have heard distinctly every word you uttered; but not feeling inclined to cavil against your arguments, I have hitherto

attended in silence. From the respectability of the adviser, I must be grateful to him for his interference; but one path of life is never open to two; therefore those who judge of another must ever do so erroneously."

"Not in the present case, Mr. Delamere," replied Mr. Richland; "the path you have so unfortunately chosen admits of no such glosing blindness; nor can the judgment that condemns it ever be in error."

Delamere replied not, and patted the head of his dog, but not in effrontery; and Mr. Richland, regretting his little success, with a cold bow, departed.

Delamere had felt most deeply while the venerable old man was speaking; the subject was so unexpected, that at first he was confounded by it, and really unable to reply; and then, that ill-directed pride, which ever reigns in ungoverned

verned and impetuous minds, rose, in fierce array, at the implied scorn of those who had once courted him, and made the well-meant advice of Mr. Richland act rather against than for its intention; but no pride could bear Delamere out against the upbraidings of his own heart; they pursued him in torment; and almost in a fever of inward accusation, he spent the remainder of the day of Mr. Richland's visit.

The relations of madame D'Alghioni were highly respectable, and suffered much from her levity of conduct. The talk of Mr. Delamere and her soon spread far and wide, and reached the ears of her sisters. One of them, in great distress, wrote immediately to her, informing her of the scandalous reports in circulation, and requesting her, as she valued her reputation, to leave Edgewolde without delay.

"See what is hanging over my head for your sake," said she to Delamere, as she put the letter into his hands. "This cruel world is resolved to persecute me, and drive me from refuge."

It had indeed become necessary that she should leave Edgewolde, even without this warning injunction. Assured in confidence as she was, it was no longer possible to brave the contempt and scorn with which she was now openly regarded; nor did Delamere seek to prevent her departure: he was irresolute of longer hurling defiance at the world.

Madame D'Alghioni read his mind with the utmost resentment; and hating Clara, as the cause of the mortification she had received, and indignant at the people for detesting glaring vice, she thought of her departure, in a mood that partook only of fury and revenge. She felt

felt she had now lost her place in society; and existing but in the luxuries and pleasure that wealth can procure, she unblushingly resolved to dash at once into the open career of infamy, and to turn a deaf ear to every voice that would recall her from its ruin.

Clara heard that madame D'Alghioni was going, but she could scarcely believe it true, until she really beheld the preparations for her departure commenced. Madame D'Alghioni and she had had little or no communication with each other for the last few weeks, and refusing to go out in the carriage with her, had drawn upon Clara such a burst of anger from Delamere, that they also had, in a measure, been almost totally estranged since.

It was madame D'Alghioni's interest to keep them asunder, and she left nothing undone, that attention, caresses, and in-

sinuations, could aid her in, on a man whose mind was kept in a continual state of irritation, or inebriation, by her arts alone. For a few days past, the indisposition of her infant son had formed an excuse for Clara not joining the party below.

The morning of madame D'Alghioni's departure, she sent up a servant to Clara, to desire her to come down, that she might bid her farewell.

The indignant blood rushed to Clara's cheek at the audacious message; and impelled beyond her usual discretion, she asked the footman if Mr. Delamere was with madame D'Alghioni. He was. "Then say to madame D'Alghioni," continued Clara, with a throb that nearly burst her heart, "that I am engaged with my child, and cannot come down, but that I send her my farewell."

"Tell your mistress," said madame D'Alghioni,

D'Alghioni, with a smile of triumphant malice, "that she is not over polite, thus rudely to part from her guest. I thank her for her farewell, and leave in return my remembrance.—Tell her so—I leave my remembrance with her."

She dashed saucily past the attending servants, and flinging herself into Delamere's carriage, was in it conveyed to the nearest stage.

Clara could scarcely breathe for thankfulness when she saw the enemy of her peace drive away. She kissed with rapture her sickly baby, that was beginning to smile once more upon his sorrowful mother; and hoping that love and happiness were returning, she listened with an anxious ear to hear the approaching step of Delamere. He came not, nor did she see him until she went down to dinner, which she had not done for some days past.

Delamere was already in the room, and seated at table; a vivid colour rose for a moment to his face as Clara entered; and rising from his chair, he apologized for sitting down before her, but from her late seclusion, he did not expect to meet her now.

It was in the tone, not the words of Delamere, that the gall lay. Clara's reviving spirits again died away at the shock; and with faltering voice she replied—"Being alone, I came to bear you company. Our little boy is much better."

"Is he?" said Delamere, coldly; "I had fancied he was worse, as you could not leave him this morning."

Clara was completely overcome; she tried to hide her agitation from the servants, and bent her head so low over her plate, that she saw her tears fall in thick drops upon it.

Silence was not broken again between them;

them ; and the moment dinner was taken away—for touched it was by neither—Delamere, as if suddenly stung, started from his chair, and, without a word, hastened, or rather rushed, from the room.

For some moments Clara sat as one stunned—like one who beheld the wreck of all their earthly dependence; for by far too much of hers hung upon her husband.

Pale and wretched, she ascended to the nursery, and again, in sad hopelessness, took her seat by her baby, that she had left scarce an hour before, in the joyful anticipation of recovering that blissful lot which Delamere and she had once enjoyed together.

She had no one to talk to—no one to console her, or sooth her with that sympathy, which though it cannot cure, yet often lightens the grief in which it

 participates.

participates. She sat lonely, communing with her own mind, in all its bitter desolation.

The tea hour at Edgewolde was generally about eight o'clock; at that time Clara descended to the drawing-room, and anxiously waited for the appearance of her husband. Nine o'clock struck, and still he was absent. Clara rung, and inquired if Mr. Delamere was in the house.

"No," was the reply.

Clara looked round her in despair; the large solitary drawing-room seemed to demand of her what had become of the times when its walls had echoed to Delamere's flute, and her sweet song, or their cheerful conversation, full of love, and happiness, and mirth. Clara bathed their recollection with floods of broken-hearted tears, and with sighs like groans mourned over their departure.

Her

Her watch was constantly in her hand; and at last, when it told ten, she could support her miserable suspense no longer, but rung the bell, and desired the servant who attended to go to the stables, and inquire if Mr. Delamere had rode out, and if any of the grooms knew whither he had gone.

The footman returned, and answered —"That Mr. Delamere had rode out about six o'clock; but none of the grooms knew whither he had gone, as he had departed unattended."

Clara heard him in utter silence; and as the servant departed, she sunk back on the sofa in motionless agony. Delamere must have rode out the moment he had quitted the dinner-table. Riding in the evening was what he had never been in the habit of doing. Whither then was he gone, at such an hour, and without an attendant?

While thoughts that almost maddened were pressing on her brain, her own woman entered the room. As she was never in the habit of doing so uncalled, Clara grew still more agitated, and hurriedly exclaimed—"What, Burdon!—Where is Mr. Delamere?"

"Pray, madam, don't be uneasy," replied the waiting-woman; "my master, I am sure, has only gone to visit some of the neighbours. I would not have taken the liberty of coming uncalled for, only John said that you were mortal pale, and looked as if you were sick; so I made bold to come in, as you were alone."

"Thank you," replied Clara, faintly. "I do indeed feel ill; I shall retire now, Burdon; I can scarcely keep up my head."

The servants, although none of them had uttered it to Mrs. Delamere, had not

not a doubt that their master was gone after madame D'Alghioni. The groom who assisted him to his horse, said he was scarlet to the very forehead, and so confused, that he could not put his foot in the stirrup without help; the gate-keeper said he galloped furiously off, the London road; and all had some remark to offer, to corroborate the suspicions of one another.

Morning came, and still no tidings of Delamere. How quickly a story spreads, has been long a matter of wonder. Before the day had expired, his flight was noised over the whole country, and that his wife was dead of sorrow.

CHAP-

CHAPTER VI.

THE first part of the report was too true; Delamere had flung from him fame, and happiness, and respectability; and followed the shameless woman who had ruined him. But Clara still lived, although in a state little short of death. A total insensibility had overspread all her faculties; and while in that situation, she knew not that lady Jane Vernon had flown to her assistance, the instant she heard of Delamere's desertion, and like a mother, watched over the fair injured sufferer.

When Clara recovered to recollection, a new shock awaited her—it was in vain that they tried to conceal it—it was too visible

visible to be hidden. As soon as Delamere's flight became public, his creditors, in alarm, had hastened to seize on whatever property was in their power. Arrest followed arrest—executions came pouring in from all quarters; and by the time that Clara awoke to consciousness, neither her wearing apparel, nor even the bed she lay on, belonged more to her. Every thing in the house of Edgewolde, and on the estates, was arrested, and the myrmidons of the law already in possession.

Perhaps it was well, for the preservation of Clara's senses, that this second blow was struck; it distracted her mind in part from the inhumanity of Delamere; and the mother struggled at her heart, as well as the wife. Poverty, that dreadful lot, was now, in all likelihood, to add deeper gloom to her already darkened days; and her sweet boys,

boys, that were born in affluence, were doomed, by their father, to depend perhaps for bread on the charity of others.

Clara at times was near deranged with these thoughts, and in anguish beyond description, she would clasp her boys to her breast, and wish that their three deserted heads were laid in the shelter of the grave.

As she could not longer remain at Edgewolde, in its present distressing state of confusion, lady Jane Vernon warmly solicited her to remove to Lester House; but Clara, remembering her unworthy husband's jealousy of its master, gratefully though decidedly refused the benevolent invitation; and lady Jane, partly guessing the cause, reluctantly forbore to press her request.

Clara, with her children, left the once-happy but now desolated Edgewolde, and under the roof of Mr. Stanton, Mr. Delamere's

Delamere's steward, found a sympathizing residence, until her own relations were apprized of her forlorn situation. Her uncle, Mr. Bentinck, no sooner heard of the desertion and distress of his niece, than he hastened to her assistance; and as soon as her health permitted her to travel, carried her to his own house in London, where he told her she was to be its mistress.

When Mr. Rivers received accounts of Delamere's conduct, he proceeded, although he left his son more of an invalid than ever, without delay, to England, to see and sooth his injured daughter, and with unceasingly accusing regret that he had ever suffered the unreflecting ardency of youth, to bend him from a rejection, which against Delamere had the sanction of reason, and all good judgment.

The meeting between Clara and her father

father was too affecting for words; she lay in his arms in silent agony, while his tears dropped heavily on the fair pale cheek, that hung in listless despair across his shoulder.

He looked on her, and glowed with indignation towards Delamere: was this faded, drooping creature, the blooming, animated being that he had given, a priceless treasure, to his arms!—"Oh, my Clara!" groaned the grieving father, "did I give my darling to him for this?"

Clara raised her languid head, and kissed him, and made an effort to say—"Father, father, forget all!" The poor agitated voice became suffocated with sobs, and in an overwhelming flood of tears, she again sunk speechless on her father's breast.

Mr. Rivers remained five weeks in England, and during that period exerted himself to discover the extent of his son-

son-in-law's ruin. The debts were enormous; and from the short time since his relapse into error, those who interested themselves in his affairs wished to conclude, for the belief of his sanity, that madame D'Alghioni had preyed upon his purse as deeply as she had upon his principles.

With this knowledge Mr. Rivers was obliged to content himself. Delamere, although he had forfeited his respectability, had not his title to the disposal of his property. Mr. Rivers spoke of putting in an arrestment in favour of the claims of Clara and her children; but she implored him to drop such a cruel intention, assuring him that the interest of her own fortune, which was twelve thousand pounds, and settled on herself, would amply supply the wants of such recluses as she and her children should be.

Mr.

Mr. Rivers gave a half willing, half reluctant consent to her prayer. He wished to throw Delamere off, in shame of his degradation; and that his daughter should henceforth be as apart from him as from pollution; yet he felt deeply that she should be thus thrown back upon her paternal relatives, without a memorial of her marriage, but the bitter ones of her injuries, and deserted boys—condemned to spend her youth in broken-heartedness, and for ever shut out from forming another and a happier union.

Those regrets and resentments of Mr. Rivers were not occasioned by any upbraidings or complainings of Clara: except her pale cheek and dejected manner, no other reproach from her accused Delamere; and if she could not soften her father and uncle to the still dear offender, her conscience assured and com-

comforted her, desolate as she was, that no voice nor wish of hers had desired to incense them.

It was matter of thankfulness to her that her boys had still an independence, poor in comparison as it was; and that no burthen of her or them helped to drain further the already nearly exhausted fortune of Delamere.

In her first amazed shock of complicated affliction, she had forgotten this blessed resource from dependence, as the wife of Delamere, even on her parents. At her marriage she heard them talk of settlements, but her happy heart was so full of love, that the world's idol, gold, found not one thought devoted to it, in that pure, enraptured dwelling. All her wealth was in the bosom of Delamere; and when he clasped her to it, the mines of the earth could not have yielded to him a richer treasure.

At

At the expiration of five weeks from his arrival in England, Mr. Rivers received letters from Italy, containing such poor accounts of his son, as made him anxiously wish to be once more with him. He did not offer to take Clara with him; her health was too feeble, and her spirits too unhappy, to bear the fatigue of a long journey, or to witness daily the drooping frame of a brother, which bore few symptoms of ever again reviving in this world.

To Clara, her children alone would have been a bar to prevent her accompanying her father; but she also thought it would be enough for her parents to view the decline of one child, without the added spectacle of another's wretchedness.

In grief almost as acute as at their meeting, Clara and her father bade each other farewell. He gave her from his arms

arms to those of her uncle, and implored him to be a stay to her, whose heart had been broken by him who should have healed it most.

When the unfortunate Delamere parted from madame D'Alghioni, his infatuation and her arts had drawn him into a promise of following her to London, when a few days absence should have made the proceeding thither not so remarkable on his part. But he did not calculate on what he was to feel, when left alone to reflection, in his once-happy home, nor the unbearable stings with which his conscience was to point out, that he was now the only degraded object at Edgewolde. The sight of Clara, pale, timid, yet looking as if she wished to forgive, raised in him a very hell of tumultuous emotion. He could have died at her feet—he could have exclaimed in torture, that he was all

pollution

pollution and ingratitude: his brain was boiling up to madness with the distraction of his mind—driven to fury with that bitterest gall, self-contempt. Clara was so pure—he so worthless! Despicable, despicable wretch! let him hurry from the paradise he had contaminated and made desolate!

Such thoughts burned within the frantic breast of Delamere, as, unable to bear himself longer in the presence of Clara and Edgewolde, he rushed, surely in a state of insanity, from a wife, lovely, attached, and virtuous, to a mistress, beautiful indeed, but treacherous, rapacious, and infamous.

He overtook madame D'Alghioni one stage from London. He had ridden the whole night; and appeared before her, so jaded, haggard, and disordered, that what was only the effects of a harrowing conscience, she attributed to unbounded

bounded passion for herself; and fancied, from this sudden pursuit, which he had made in madness, not in love, that her empire over him was fixed beyond overthrow.

They proceeded together to town; where Delamere, at her instigation, for he was in a manner deranged himself, raised supplies upon bonds, drawn at such an exorbitant rate, that madame D'Alghioni paused, to consider how long her dupe would be worth her attention. For the present he had gold at command; and though bought with the future ruin of Delamere, his wife, and children, it did not fail to purchase one splendour, or one luxury, for madame D'Alghioni, with as careless profusion as if Edgewolde had never been a name in her ears.

They hastened to the Continent, and changing their names to Mr. and Mrs.

St. George, travelled to Switzerland, where, under that new appellation, they were, for many months, lost to all inquiries that were made after them.

In his wildest times, Delamere had never been given to intemperance, until madame D'Alghioni raised the cup to his lip, and tempted him to drink the poison. That dreadful Lethe was now his only resource from wretchedness and remorse; and his false mistress, instead of checking what she saw was preying, like venom, on his constitution, encouraged him to his bane, and surrounded him with companions, of whom intoxication formed the principal delight.

Madame D'Alghioni cared not for the sacrifice of Delamere; she was light and inconstant, and almost already wearied of one whose finances she apprehended

prehended would soon cease to administer to her pleasures.

CHAPTER VII.

By the ensuing summer, the large sums which Delamere had brought with him from England were expended, and several bills, which he had drawn on his bankers there, returned dishonoured. He had also written twice to his agent at Edgewolde, to raise supplies for him there; but to neither of his letters had he ever received a reply.

But only one of his letters, the first, had ever reached Mr. Stanton, which that gentleman had answered upon receipt, stating, in full terms, the ruinous posture of affairs at Edgewolde, the ar-

estment of the rents, and the total in-
capability of any draft of his being ho-
noured in the present pecuniary diffi-
culties of the property; mentioning also,
with the freedom of an old friend of the
family, the unhappy situation into
which Mrs. Delamere had been plunged
by his absence, and her generosity, in
refusing to harass further his embar-
rassed fortune by any claim of hers, con-
fining herself to the interest of her mar-
riage dower.

This letter Delamere never received;
it was delivered to madame D'Alghioni,
who opened and read all his letters.
No sooner did she peruse it, than she
flung it into the fire; and finding, from
its contents, that Delamere could no
longer support her extravagance, sh
turned her thoughts to devise some m
thod of quietly abandoning him to
ruin which she had occasioned,

would not share. In that design she destroyed all the other letters which Delamere wrote on the subject, and continually irritated him by taunts of the want of respect which his men of business showed him, until at last she worried him into a resolution of repairing himself to England, to procure the money so wanted, and to punish the audacity of those who had treated him with such contemptuous silence.

Roused in part from his deplorable lethargy by this resolution, Delamere reflected on what was to become of his fair and frail companion during his absence. It was scarcely with regret that he thought of their approaching separation; it was in the senses alone that he had ever fallen a victim to madame D'Alghioni; and when admitted into the familiarity of domestic intercourse with her, he found her manners so op-

posite to those of the modest and delicate Clara, that disgust, instead of passion, was, at times, his feeling towards her. A gleam of the blissful past glanced across Delamere's mind, at the prospect of revisiting England. She was there—the forsaken, but ever-adored idol of his soul! Could he return to her? No! Oh God, no! That pure heart would never again receive a wretch so stained as he!

Despair came deeper on Delamere, from the ray of hope that had so transiently beguiled him, and brought, in horrible array, to his recollection, the lost, degraded being he was, and the unfortunate woman who for him had sacrificed the sanction of the just and the good.

When infatuation does seize upon a person, it is astonishing to what lengths it will extend, even in the strongest minds.

minds. Delamere knew that when he first saw madame D'Alghioni, she was talked lightly of, and that he had good reason to believe in the truth of the report. Her applications to him for money, her coming in so singular a manner to Edgewolde, and her conduct there, might have made him justly suspicious that he was not the only man whom she had favoured with her condescension; but when vanity begins to be flattered, the approach to infatuation is not far distant, and, except to himself, Delamere believed madame D'Alghioni spotless. To leave her, who, he imagined, had no other friend than himself, cost him many uneasy reflections. He asked her not to accompany him to England, for he wished no more to hurl defiance at decency there; nor did madame D'Alghioni express the least desire to follow him, but hastened him in his de-

parture, while with false caresses she talked of their quickly meeting again. She was lavish of her tears at parting; but amidst her grief she was able to beseech of Delamere, that immediately upon his receipt of money, he would transmit to her a bill for some hundreds.

Delamere assured her of the largest remittance which it would be in his power to send, and besought her to live retired during the short period of his absence. Madame D'Alghioni vowed that she should scarcely see a face, beyond her own household, until he rejoined her; and again conjuring him to remit her money as early as possible, they parted.

He took his Swiss servant with him, and rather by stealth, under apprehension of his creditors, set out from Geneva.

Delamere travelled through a lovely country, but his eyes were darkened from

from the admiration of nature; a night of gloom reigned within his breast; and the thought that he was to return through these fair scenes, to be again the degraded paramour of madame D'Alghioni, blasted to his eyes the very light of day, until, in an acute agony of mind, he inwardly exclaimed—"I will not return to this pollution more! Let her, miserable wretch, live on my fortune; but let me be far from her, even though I starve in a Lapland cave!"

He breathed more freely as he swore to this approving resolution, and his path seemed to brighten to his gaze, as he journeyed on, further and further from the abode of vice and infamy.

Never, never, he swore again, should contamination touch him more! He would seek some solitude, and mourn for ever his guilt and his ingratitude—make the memory of his bliss with Clara, his

shrine of constant penitence—and die a lonely and unlamented man. Clara would then be free, to be the wife perhaps of some worthier husband. Every nerve in the frame of Delamere thrilled with cold anguish at this suggestion of his desponding fancy—"But I shall be in my grave, and senseless to his bliss! Oh, Clara! do you wish me there?"

Delamere could not pursue this train of thought—it was turning his brain; he gave the spur to his horse, and with reckless desperation, galloped furiously over all obstacles, careless of destruction.

The day, that had shone delightfully fair when he left Geneva, became, towards the afternoon, overcast with threatening clouds; and in a long dreary part of the road, where no habitation was discernible, one of those torrents of rain, so frequent on the Continent, began to pour with unceasing violence. It continued

tinued unabated, while Delamere was exposed to it, and wet, and cold, and exhausted, he gladly took shelter in the wretched cabaret that was at the end of the stage. He rested miserably upon his hard bed; he felt ill in body, and the state of his mind added to his disorder.

Next morning he was not able to proceed; his head ached to agony, and a shivering chillness overspread his whole frame. The following day he was worse; and on the third, finding no abatement of his indisposition, he fancied that he was dying, and bade his servant hasten to Geneva for madame D'Alghioni and a lawyer, that he might secure to her some provision against the neglect of the world she had sacrificed for him; and see it, in this land of strangers, put into her own hand, while his dying lips had power to direct. This was justice which he thought he owed; but, Clara,

Clara! how often, in that poor, solitary chamber, was that sweet name uttered, in all the mournful exclamations of love, remorse, contrition, and regret!

It was drawing towards the fifth anniversary of his marriage: to compare that time with what was now, when he was in the plenitude of wealth, and happiness, and love the most exquisite—oh, could he think, and retain his reason! His wild groans rose in perfect despair, and hollowly reechoed through his deserted chamber. No hand was there to support that frenzied head, nor voice to speak of mercy, when he shrieked that his fate was just—desolate in this world, and hopeless in the next! To bid farewell to Clara—to trace with his dying hand the word love once more to her, Delamere felt, would make his troubled spirit pass gentler from its harassed clay: he staggered, with a false strength, to

the

the door, and called to the hostess, who answered, to bring him writing materials. With fluttering breath, and eager hand, he snatched a pen, as if his soul would depart before it could confess itself to his wife.—" I love you—I loved you ever; and am dying far, far from you, Clara! Will you think of me in my grave? Oh, be it with mercy to the erring heart that moulders there! Clara!—oh, what would I say? I cannot think. Am I to die in my sins to you? My poor boys—oh, God, their mother!" Delamere's head dropped over the paper—anguish overpowered itself, and in a long fainting fit, oblivion, for a time, was granted to his distracted brain.

When he recovered, all strength was gone; he could but barely sign and address the letter, in characters scarcely legible; his hand sunk down then, as if never more to move; and his languid eyes

eyes dwelt, with a fond, sad melancholy, on the letter, as it lay on the table beside him. His hostess, who had folded and sealed it for him, promised that it should go according to its direction, if necessary; and then hurried off to tell her husband, that the gentleman was mad as well as dying.

It was not till the following morning that Luval, Delamere's valet, returned, and he appeared alone. He related, that when he reached Geneva, he sought in vain for madame D'Alghioni, and that he learned she had departed, in less than two hours after his master had bidden her adieu, with count Ildestien, to travel together for Rome; and that the landlord of the house they lodged at, monsieur Didier, seemed so very desirous to know whither Mr. Delamere had gone, as madame D'Alghioni had quitted Geneva in the same clandestine

tine manner as himself, that Luval fancied it his wisest plan to leave the lawyer unsought for, and hasten back to Monteille, to warn his master that the sooner he got out of the reach of monsieur Didier, the more secure he should be of his liberty.

This precaution of Luval was in vain; Delamere was past moving, and in a short period more, past rationality. As Luval gave his narration, an idea, for the first time, struck Delamere that he had been deceived, and the dupe of a wanton. He uttered a piercing cry of astonishment and rage, and violently attempted to fling himself out of bed. Weak as he had been but the moment before, it now required the united force of his host and Luval to keep him down. He raved of madame D'Alghioni, execrating her arts and her perfidy, and madly calling on them to end his existence. His delirium

rium rose to such a height, that he was obliged to be bound down in bed; yet still his frantic exclamations of having been betrayed, and his loud cries for some hand to free him of life, rung from the top to the bottom of the little inn.

Whilst Luval and the host were consulting what was to be done with this unhappy stranger, both anxious to get quit of him, monsieur Didier, who had sharply traced the footsteps of Luval, arrived at the inn, with some officers of justice; and searching out the apartment of Delamere, arrested him. He was about to proceed to take possession of what effects his prisoner had with him, when Luval and the host each put in a claim—the one for wages, and the other for his bill.

The altercation of the three was carried on in the sick man's chamber; and so little feeling or consideration had they

for

for him, that their voices, in violent contention, were often extended to the loudest tones of passion, and mingled with, and sometimes drowned, the mad ravings of the unconscious Delamere.

Luval, who had been with the guilty pair, from their first arrival on the Continent, had soon understood that St. George was a feigned name; and of late madame D'Alghioni was at so little pains to conceal the real appellation of her unhappy companion, that it became universally known over Geneva, that he was the Mr. Delamere who had several months back rendered himself so notorious in the mouths of the London public.

When they had come to some sort of arrangement, Luval mentioned this discovery to monsieur Didier and the host, producing the letter which Delamere had written to his wife. Didier, with the

the most inhuman haste, dispatched it by post, enclosed in one from himself, declaring that his unfortunate debtor should remain for ever a prisoner, until his demands on him were settled.

As it was impossible to remove Delamere at this moment, and his host retaining sufficient in his possession to indemnify himself for additional expences, the wretched sufferer was left at Monteille, under the charge of the civil powers there, until he should be in a condition to be carried to the prison of Geneva.

CHAPTER VIII.

DELAMERE'S letter, and the menacing one of monsieur Didier, reached Clara. Could words describe the effect they had

had upon her? or pencil paint the agony of her countenance, as she flew to seek her uncle, with the fatal papers grasped in her hand? She but gained his presence, and convulsively uttered—"Delamere is dead!" when she staggered, and fell lifeless at his feet.

Mr. Bentinck, surprised and alarmed, loudly called for assistance; for, being laid up with the gout, he could not raise her himself.

The letters were so firmly clasped in Clara's hand, that, until she recovered, it was impossible to remove them.

In speechless despair she gave them to her uncle, who, as he perused them, could not help observing—"Most justly rewarded!" but glancing his eye at the death-like figure of his niece, he softened his remarks, and added—"I shall order my solicitor to write immediately,

diately, to know what can be done for this unhappy man."

"Nothing — nothing more!" cried Clara, wringing her hands; "he is dead! My Delamere! my Delamere!"

"Nay, Clara," said Mr. Bentinck, soothingly, "you are alarming yourself too readily. Had the worst happened, this Didier would have mentioned it. Be calm, dear Clara, and remember the injustice of this man to you."

"Oh, uncle, I cannot remember but that I loved him better than the whole, whole world! All err and find forgiveness. Shall Delamere be the only one excluded from mercy? Shall I, who would sacrifice existence for him, leave him deserted in life, or unwept in the grave? No, uncle, I will go to him. In a prison, or in his coffin, he is all that my heart can ever think of more."

"I will not allow you to go to him, Clara,"

Clara," said Mr. Bentinck. "I must consider for you, since your own judgment seems to fail in its wonted discretion, and prevent you from offending the estimable of the world, by joining a man so lost to himself and respectability as Mr. Delamere."

"What is the world to me," replied Clara, with weeping energy, "apart from Delamere? With him it is a paradise; but without him I care not for its voice nor its gifts. I will go."

"Then, Clara, you may prepare to encounter some disagreeable interviews ——"

"I will," hastily interrupted Clara, "if I can succour Delamere. But *she* will not be there. Ah, I know how that beguiled heart was deceived! None but a wife will watch the dying couch of Delamere."

The last sentence threw Clara into a flood

flood of agonized tears; while Mr. Bentinck, with admiring pity, reflected on the love that woman so often ill bestows.

Mr. Bentinck persisted in denying the prayers of Clara, to seek her husband, but assured her that his solicitor, instead of writing, should set out the following day, expressly to search for, and assist Delamere.

Clara heard his determination in weeping silence; and the next morning she was gone from her uncle's house. She wrote to him, that she could not exist, and be absent from Delamere, in such a time of affliction; besought him to forgive her disobedience, and to watch over her poor boys, deserted now by mother as well as father.—"Pray for me, dear uncle!" concluded she; "the arm of God was never implored to protect a more despairing traveller."

The distress of Mr. Bentinck, at this rash

rash step of his niece, was unspeakable; and alarmed at what might befall so lovely and unprotected a traveller, he hurried his solicitor after her, with orders to beseech her to return, or if that request failed, to accompany her to Switzerland.

Deeply did he regret his own invalid state, that forced him to delegate such an office to another, and anxiously waited, in the hopes of seeing Clara return from her fond and unreflecting design. He expected her in vain; and shortly received a letter from Mr. Reed, informing him that he had overtaken Clara at Dover, and finding her immoveable in her resolution of proceeding, was now on his way with her to Switzerland.

Monsieur Didier had dated his letter from Geneva, and to that city the travellers hastened, journeying almost by night

night and by day. The moment they arrived there, Clara, whose anxiety had arisen to agony as she entered the town, would have hastened immediately in search of monsieur Didier, had not her strength totally failed her at this last eventful stage of their journey. She was carried into the hotel in a state of complete exhaustion; and the moment he saw her properly attended to, Mr. Reed, at her urgent adjuration, departed to gain tidings of Delamere.

He had not been gone five minutes, ere he returned, pleasure beaming in every feature.—"Delamere?" cried Clara, breathlessly.

"Not him, madam," replied Mr. Reed, "but another friend, whose presence will be little less acceptable." And as he spoke Mr. Rivers entered the room.

Clara sprung to meet him, and as she threw

threw herself into his arms, hysterically shrieked—"Father, is he dead?"

"My child—my generous child!" exclaimed Mr. Rivers, folding his daughter fondly to his breast—"be relieved of all apprehension—Delamere lives, and is near you!

A faint cry of thankfulness faltered on the lips of Clara; she attempted to smile on her father, but sunk on his breast, in a happy insensibility.

When she again opened her eyes, they beamed like joyous stars through her tears; and her fair cheek flushed and faded, with alternate emotions of rapture and compassion, as she listened to a recital of the causes which had led to the unexpected appearance of her father in Geneva.

Upon Delamere's removal from Monteille to the prison at Geneva, the report of the circumstance was soon noised

about amongst the English resident there; and as the name of the unfortunate man was no longer a secret, a gentleman, who knew his connexions, wrote to Mr. Rivers, then at Pisa, a detail of the whole affair, and represented the deplorable situation of his son-in-law, in the most forcible and beseeching language.

Mr. Rivers, justly indignant against Delamere, immediately replied, that from the conduct of that young man to part of his family, he could no longer look upon him, even in the light of an acquaintance, and requested that all correspondence, in which his name was mentioned, should be for ever dropped to him, and declined any interference whatever in his concerns.

Major Leighmore, who had thus interested himself for Delamere, being personally acquainted with Mr. Rivers, ventured,

ventured, on the strength of their own friendship, to write again in behalf of that wretched cast-away. He assured Mr. Rivers, that it was compassion alone that brought him forward to plead for Delamere; that he execrated, as much as man could do, the conduct which had plunged him into such retributive misery; but feeling the necessity of all for mercy, he could not withhold his from a being so lost and deserted as Delamere, who had been brought, in a dying condition, to the prison at Geneva, and was, from a state of frantic despair, fallen into a morbid melancholy, little short of a total deprivation of his reason. Major Leighmore also assured Mr. Rivers, that any whose presence might have been baneful to the peace of his family, were far, and for ever, removed from the wretched prisoner, abandoning

him to utter neglect, and rioting with others in a continuation of infamy; and finished by conjuring him to come forward in behalf of his unfortunate son-in-law.

Mr. Rivers denied not this second appeal, and at the solicitations of his family, and his own humane disposition, he set out without loss of time for Geneva.

Directly on his arrival he sought out the benevolent major Leighmore, and with him proceeded to the dreary abode of the misguided Delamere. Major Leighmore entered first, to prepare the poor prisoner for the appearance of Mr. Rivers; but he received the intelligence in such listless silence, that the major scarcely knew if he comprehended him.

If the alteration in Clara's appearance had shocked Mr. Rivers, that of Delamere,

mere, from the athletic glow of manly grace, to utter debility and emaciation, struck him, if possible, still more forcibly, and in a voice really tremulous from emotion, he said—"Mr. Delamere, I am truly grieved to see you in this situation."

As if the tones had suddenly struck some chord of less deadened sensibility than that which he had previously exhibited, Delamere for a moment raised his eyes, that had hitherto been immovably fixed on the ground, and fastened them with a wild glance upon Mr. Rivers.

The gaze for an instant was steadfast, when a deep crimson rushed across his haggard cheeks, and hastily burying his face in both his hands, he looked up no more during the remainder of the time that the gentlemen stayed. He spoke not at all, and Mr. Rivers, quite

unprepared for this total wreck of person and intellect, left the prison, deeply accusing his inattention to the first interference of major Leighmore.

On the arrest of Delamere by monsieur Didier, many other creditors in Geneva had also put in their claims, so that when Mr. Rivers had a meeting with them, he found that, for the present, he could not, without assistance, release his son-in-law. That difficulty did not, however, long embarrass him; several of the English in Geneva, who knew his respectability, came forward to offer their credit on the occasion; and matters being thus arranged with the creditors of Delamere, he was liberated from prison, and conducted to comfortable lodgings by his father-in-law, where the best care and the ablest medical advice were procured for him.

His health mended rapidly, but the depression

depression on his spirits seemed to yield to no attempt of cure, although it did not longer bear any symptoms of insanity. It appeared more of despair, that fancied all was lost, and a sensitive feeling of unworthiness, that made him shrink from communion with his fellow-beings, expecting scorn to be his portion amongst them. He had recognised Mr. Rivers; but except to answer that gentleman when he addressed him, he had never yet ventured to speak to him, nor dared to lift up an eye in his presence.

Mr. Rivers bore himself with Christian kindness to the unhappy sufferer; but penitent as Delamere seemed to be, he firmly hoped that his daughter and he should never meet again; and only waited until it could be done without injury to his health, to propose to De-

lamere terms of final separation from Clara.

Her name had never been uttered between them, nor any reference to the misconduct of her husband. Mr. Rivers wished to leave the subject to one interview alone, as he had made up his mind to what should be the consequences; and Delamere, agonized with the recollection of it, trembled every moment he was in Mr. Rivers's presence, lest it should be entered upon; yet, at the same time, he panted to declare, at his feet, his deep repentance, and regret of his guilt.

Things were in this train when Clara arrived at Geneva, so full of love and forgiveness to her husband, that Mr. Rivers felt all desire he had of separating them must now be resigned, and a union probably be renewed again between them. He was reluctant now, as he had hitherto been, and shook his head,

in

in doubting prediction, as he bade his daughter consider on what might further be her destiny with Delamere.

"Nothing but happiness, dear father!" said Clara, a tear of love starting to her soft eye; "we have both tried the inexperience of youth, and shall be the wiser for it henceforth."

"You, my child!" exclaimed Mr. Rivers; "what of youth have you shewn, but its loveliest and most virtuous aspect? you—to class yourself with a being so fallen and guilty as Delamere!"

"And one so penitent, dear father," said the sweet and forgiving Clara; "is it not with the repentant that the mercy of Heaven is to be found? and if Delamere feels he has offended there, and we pray together, in lament for our sins, may we not humbly hope for happiness here, and pardon hereafter?"

"Thou best of Heaven's beings!" cried the fond father, clasping her, in overpowering emotion, to his heart; "if God sends an angel for the salvation of this poor sinner, may no mortal part him from the mercy! Return to him then, Clara: blessed you are as mine, and blessed—blessed be you as his!"

To prepare Delamere for her reception required some consideration; and one day that Mr. Rivers paid him his accustomary visit, after a little desultory conversation, he said—"Is there no friend of mine, Delamere, you would wish to inquire about?"

Delamere cast a look of agonized supplication on Mr. Rivers, and his countenance glowed, to burning crimson, as he lowered it to the earth, in the silence of conscious abasement.

"You well know that there are some of my family who have not heard of your

your illness with indifference," continued his father-in-law; "and as the suffering has not been all on your side, I thought you might wish to gain some information of those who have never ceased to desire tidings of you."

"Oh, Mr. Rivers! oh, God! spare me!" groaned Delamere, flinging his head in anguish on the table; "I durst not inquire. I felt myself a slur in your eyes, and a curse in your recollection. I am hideous to myself, and unfit to name any good or pure thing."

"Let conscience, then, be your accuser," said Mr. Rivers, in a serious tone; "if it speak, the loudest voice of man is weak in comparison. Your sins against me were deep, in return for what I bestowed upon you. Prudence would have visited your misconduct with severity; but affection overpowers justice, and the most injured of your friends is

 the

the first to forgive, and to return to you."

Delamere rushed to Mr. Rivers, and with a stifled shriek sunk at his feet.—"Clara!" uttered he, in wild emotion; "oh, do not my lips pollute that name? What—what is it you mean? Conscience is returning the murder of itself. Torture me not! All I have done to you and yours——Oh, God! oh, God! justice has repaid it!"

The breathing of Delamere rose and fell, in convulsive throes, and his whole frame, as it lay in the supporting arms of Mr. Rivers, palpitated to spasms with the wild beatings of each throbbing artery.

Mr. Rivers rested him in a chair.—"Be calmer, Delamere, and I will bring your pardon to you."

He moved from the room as he spoke, and Delamere, bewildered with doubt, expectation,

expectation, and shame, and distracted by the tumultuous commotion of his soul, gazed on the door, as if life were fixed in the look. It opened, and Mr. Rivers entered. Who hung so lovely and so pale upon his arm? Ah! was it Clara? Was that heavenly eye again bent in its modest and tender glance upon Delamere? He started forward —then shrunk back, and stood immoveable: conscience rooting him like a statue, while love, never vanquished, though forsaken, struggled to throw him in adoration at her feet.

"Delamere," said Mr. Rivers, advancing with his daughter, "I come to give you Clara once more. In this second union, the hand of God is, I trust, visible, in making her the cement of an erring and repentant soul with its Creator. You have suffered, Delamere, for want of thoroughly knowing that the

surest

surest bond of happiness here and hereafter, is fidelity to faith and honour. Be that your guide through future years. And thou, oh God, bless with thy mercy this renewed union of love and penitence! Take her, Delamere."

The voice of Mr. Rivers ceased in emotion; he kissed the pale cheek of Clara, and, withdrawing his arm from her clinging hold, put her cold hand into the almost powerless one of Delamere.

The two stood trembling before each other; then, without a murmur, sunk into a mutual and deep embrace.

Thus then was Delamere restored to that lot which man may scoff at, but can never know happiness without—the Eden of domestic faith and affection. He had felt what it was to wander from its hallowed sphere—felt, ah! how deeply, that it is no path of roses that leads apart from the peaceful home of wedded love,

nor

nor no soothing quiet that watches by the pillow whence rectitude, principle, and self-respect, are banished.

CHAPTER IX.

With his earliest ability to travel, Delamere hastened to leave Geneva. It was to him a place of shame and horror. In the necessary interviews which he had with monsieur Didier and his former valet Luval, he learned a galling knowledge of the mercenary deceit of madame D'Alghioni towards himself; and heard from several gentlemen, that her character for intrigue had been so notorious, before she left Florence for England, that all respectable acquaintance had dropped her society; and that while she lived

lived with him in Geneva, it was the wonder of all, and the laughter of many, that he should have continued blind so long to the almost open gallantry which she was pursuing, or ignorant of the unblushing demands which she made upon the purses of the men of fortune who frequented their house.

As Delamere listened to this last trait of her character, a ray of piercing intelligence burst upon his senses; he remembered the note to lord Lester which he had seized from her at Edgewolde. It was from herself; and he had dared to profane his wife with the belief, that her pure hand had penned that infamous scrawl. A thousand tongues could not have proclaimed Clara freer from knowledge of that fatal letter, than did now the awakened judgment of Delamere. He had wronged her then in thought as in faith—he had stabbed the heart that adored

adored him, that its pure blood might gush at the feet of an artful liar, and a perfidious wanton!

Delamere would have flown from recollection of himself, while, astonished at his fate, he would wonder that Heaven had not hurled him in his crimes into the perdition which was his due. He mentioned not to Clara this aggravation of his guilt to her; enough had she forgiven, without this outrage on the purity and devotedness of her affection to him. He needed not an exculpation, which he knew would rend her heart to be required to give. All stood forth clear and unobscured, that could elevate her or debase himself.

Hating Geneva, and the presence of those good-natured friends who told him of his follies only when he had discovered them himself, and loathing the clime where the gay fiend still gloried, who had

had helped him to his fall, Delamere was ardent in his desire to leave the Continent; nor could Mr. Rivers, who understood what must be his feelings, continue the request he had first made, that he should accompany him with Clara to Pisa, and remain there for the winter, as part of his family. Nor independently of that, could he have pressed it, when he reflected on the anxiety which Delamere must have to investigate, as soon as possible, into his involved affairs, and the solicitude which his daughter must feel to return to her deserted little boys.

The same day witnessed the departure of both parties from Geneva; Mr. Rivers was setting out for Pisa, hurried thither by accounts of the still-declining health of his son. Clara bore up, until the actual moment of departure arrived; but when she threw herself into her father's

arms,

arms, for his last embrace, the thought of separating from him, of her brother probably dying, and of all that had passed betwixt her and her husband, crowded on her mind with one mighty swell of feeling, that burst through all attempt at composure.

The sight of her distress agonized Delamere; he held her hand, but could not dare to offer consolation, where he had caused such deep and desolating grief. His voice was in the pressure of his hand. Clara's generous heart started from its transient selfishness, and, with a feeling beyond description, she turned from her father's embrace, and threw herself on the breast of her husband.

Delamere received her, penetrated beyond the power of speech. A few moments passed in agitated silence, when Mr. Rivers, struggling against his emotion, said—"Delamere, I need not revert

vert to what is past: if what you have suffered, and what you have regained, do not fortify your principles, and secure you in future rectitude, the voice of friendship would be weak and unheard. You are now enjoying the greatest privilege which is allowed to man. You fell—into what degradation let your own heart tell: all honest bliss was lost to you, and all esteem and respect. Yet those gifts are in part restored to you, and will, I pray God, be soon wholly so; while she who shared in your guilt, whose crime is not one degree more heinous in the sight of Heaven than your own, is banished from all hope of restoration to the good in this world. She may repent; she may be penitent; she may wear out the remainder of her days in remorse and sorrow; yet ever will she be a mark of scorn, and for the virtuous and the worthy to avoid;

while

while you return to fill your place again in society, to be happy, to be respectable, to acquire anew esteem, and finally, perhaps, to rank with the estimable and the good. Such is the distinction which the judgment of this world has decreed: it is in the other alone that frail and repentant woman must hope for pardon."

Delamere had listened with eyes sunk in humility, nor raised them while in low and agitated accents he replied—"I am sensible of the privilege that restores me to happiness and rank, so justly forfeited; but that I am silent on a distinction which might be so eloquently discussed, impute alone to the overwhelming sensations that must accompany any thought of mine, on a subject so vitally connected with myself. I have experienced mercy unspeakable. The world may allow me to regain its esteem, but in its best approbation my heart

heart must ever retain the remembrance, that a more impartial judgment awaits me hereafter. Clara, I will not make promises to you; I broke sacred ones before; but I ask you, will you trust me once more?"

Clara, who, during this conversation, had hung weeping on the shoulder of her husband, half raised her eyes at this tender request, and while they beamed through dewy tears, softly uttered—"Yes, Delamere, I will trust you once more, and for ever;" and while she sunk into his deep and passionate embrace, Mr. Rivers, moved beyond language to express, extended his hands to heaven, and silently implored a blessing on this reunion of penitence and love.

They parted in earnest reconciliation; and while Mr. Rivers pursued his way to Pisa, Delamere and Clara retraced their steps to England.

The

The moment that restored their children to their arms was one of most heart-rending emotion to Delamere: the little innocents knew not that he had ever abandoned them; and their soft caresses, their eager kisses of welcome from one parent to the other, and their joyous cries that papa and mamma were come, opened afresh the yet bleeding wounds of his conscience, and made him shrink from the pollution that was so innocently offered to his wife, in blending his name with the fond and unaccusing welcome that belonged to her alone. But if possible, still more were his feelings harrowed, when he came to investigate the state of his affairs; he shuddered over the ruin he found there; and all Clara's influence failed to sooth the agony that wrung his soul, when he found that an humble home was all he had now to offer her; and that Edgewolde,

wolde, his native Edgewolde, which she had once made a paradise to him, it was probable their straitened circumstances would never again permit them to inhabit.

Whatever murmurs or reproaches followed this fall into indigence, proceeded from the lips of Delamere alone; Clara had forgiven and forgotten all but the present happiness of their reunion: too sincere in her attachment, and too generous in her nature, to make a boast of her merits, or a theme of her conduct, a stranger who had visited them in their retired and humble home, would never have imagined that other means than unforeseen misfortune had reduced them to a sphere so far inferior to what their manners, deportment, and accomplishments, so evidently showed had once been theirs.

Clara was not allowed to retire into this

this obscurity, without many remonstrances from Mr. Bentinck: he made no parade of services to Delamere, but for his niece's sake, he would willingly have presented them with the means of living in a manner less secluded than that into which they had retired.

He made the proposal to Clara, and earnestly desired that it should be accepted. Delamere heard it with a tumult of bitter emotion; to live dependent on those who despised him—to be the object of their bounty whom he had injured and outraged—"No, Clara," said he, struggling with his agitated feelings, "I can humble myself to the earth to you, but to another—never! I will not wound you, nor wrong you, by wishing that you were to share the affluent home of your uncle: it would be sacrilege against your affection, to

doubt that you are happy in this humble abode with me. It is for you I murmur, Clara—for you I regret: be you but happy with me, and for myself, I care not if a straw-roof were to be my home."

Mr. Bentinck reluctantly received a denial of his generous offers, and expressed his regret that his niece should be buried in an obscurity so unworthy of her virtues and her deserts.

The smile of Clara was cheerful as a summer sun, as she replied—"Regret not for me, dearest uncle; but think of me, in my humble home, as the happiest of the happy; united in affection with my husband and my children, my lot can never be but blessed, while their tenderness surrounds me."

"Ah, Clara," interrupted Mr. Bentinck, "you are too——"

"Oh, hush, dear uncle!" cried she, hastily;

hastily; "do not wound me, by recalling to my recollection a subject once so painful. Forget, if possible, whatever can prejudice you against one so dear to me, or at least, let me not know that you remember in displeasure." Tender tears gushed from the eyes of Clara as she spoke.

"I must finish the sentence still," said Mr. Bentinck, viewing her with admiring affection; "you are too amiable, too generous—God grant that good and tender heart may now and for ever more be happy, and cherished as its virtues deserve!"

In this retirement, it was not, however, Clara's destiny to be long secluded. In the course of another year her brother died abroad, and at his demise she succeeded to a large property, willed to her by a relation, in the event of her brother dying unmarried.

Liberal as the fortune was thus devolved to them, it was insufficient to free Delamere from the whole extent of his involvements; yet it restored to them Edgewolde, and enabled him once more to inhabit the seat of his ancestors.

It was a trying event to Clara: she had loved her brother with a sister's true affection—how she had loved her husband, let these pages tell: by this beloved brother's death, she beheld a husband whom she adored, rescued from an obscurity so different from the promise of his birth, and so uncongenial to his talents and education, restored to the estate of his ancestors, and enabled to display to the world that total reformation of character, which had formed the happiness and the bliss of their retired and secluded home.

On the other side, she viewed her own loss, in the brother and friend of her

her earlier years, and the deep and lasting grief of her parents, deprived of their only son. In this distracting state of mind, she had at least the consolation of the entire sympathy of her husband: whatever he might be supposed to feel at an event so advantageous for himself, he showed only the most tender participation in the affliction of his wife, devoting his time and his thoughts then, as ever, to every kind and soothing attention, that could form or add to the happiness of her who had forgiven and loved, so truly and so well.

One of the first who welcomed their return to Edgewolde, was lord Lester: he had married in the interim of their absence, and now brought his wife, to solicit for her the acquaintance and friendship of Clara. Lady Jane Vernon came along with them; and tears of benevolent pleasure shone in her eyes, as

she embraced and welcomed back the fair, and now once-more happy mistress of Edgewolde.

It might be that Delamere, on first re-entering that society which he had two years since left, in such disgrace and reprobation, would feel he was amongst those who struggled with their conscience to receive him; but with Clara by his side, that guardian angel of his erring path, what heart would have expressed a look or word to pain her? she had pardoned and brought back the repentant sinner; with her lay the mercy—to them only to follow the example she had given.

Yet, though much was ceded to the admiration and esteem which Clara's conduct had inspired, many years elapsed ere Delamere thoroughly recovered his once-ruined character. At the last it was, however, justly accorded; no

after

after errors arose, to harrow up the recollection of his former guilty aberations. Experience had proved to him, what precept had never accomplished in a mind so naturally reckless as his; he had bought, at its dearest price, a knowledge of the faults which had first led him into folly, and thence, as is too frequently the transition, into guilt and wretchedness.

The human heart is accused of ingratitude; but Delamere's after life was one continued scene of grateful love to Clara: voluntary it was in its devotion, ceding all to one who exacted nothing but by her total oblivion of the past, and her tender and ever-existing affection.

END OF VOL. II.

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BRIDE OF OBEYDA,

AND OTHER TALES.

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THE

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And other Tales.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

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ADVENTURE OF A HALF-PAY.

THE

ADVENTURE OF A HALF-PAY.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL Walsford was one of the many gallant men who fell in the Peninsular war; his only son was his aid-de-camp at the time, and had the honour to be mentioned in the dispatches which brought home the accounts of his father's death, as a brave and meritorious officer. His promotion to a lieutenancy followed almost immediately this report; but as the war continued, and others

fell, and others were also recommended, young Walsford found that his day of promise had been but an April one—soon to shine and soon to cloud. In short, he was forgotten, as many have been before; and in 1816, was turned adrift, on lieutenant's half-pay, to rub through the world as he best could.

His mother was dead, and his home, for the first few months after his disbandment, was to be with a brother of hers, who had been the guardian of Walsford's little patrimony while he remained under age.

Mr. Abbot, his uncle, was a man of large property, and lived in superior style; but Walsford, in the elegant apartments of Priorton, regretted his little scantily-furnished barrack-room, and would gladly have exchanged the unceasing

ceasing music of Miss Abbot's piano, for the echoing call of a parade bugle.

Had Walsford been a fortune-hunter, there was good scope for his manœuvres in the neighbourhood of Priorton; it was famed for heiresses—no fewer than two in one family; besides several other young ladies possessed of handsome fortunes, within the circle of his acquaintance: there was Louisa Morden, with the bloom of a summer rose—Hester De Grey, with her distant and heavenly eye—Maria Blundel, proud and beauteous as a Juno—Eliza Warden, blue-eyed as Love himself—and Sophia Reynolds, with the mein of the Idalian queen.

Mr. Abbot, who was quite a man of the world, strongly advised Walsford to pay his devoirs to one of these ladies, ensuring him at the same time of suc-

cess; for Walsford was exceedingly handsome, and carried in his appearance that gentle yet manly look which ladies love.

Walsford, however, leant a deaf ear to his uncle's exhortations; not that he wanted a heart, but there were two bars to his becoming a lover or a husband, which he had neither prospect nor hope of removing—he was poor, and he was proud, and scorned alike to reduce a woman to his mediocrity of fortune, as to owe to one, affluence which her wealth alone must procure. Determined therefore against the worldly persuasions of Mr. Abbot, he would not allow himself to be a lingerer in society, which he felt might be dangerous. Fond of field sports, he sought them in the fine country around; and resolutely resigning the few pretensions he ever had to the character

racter of a ladies' man, he devoted his whole time to the healthful exercise procured him by his dog and gun.

One day, coming along a retired part of a hill, he perceived a woman seated at some little distance in his path: as he approached, she stood up, and advancing towards him, dropped him a courtesy, and presented him a letter.

"For me?" demanded Walsford, astonished at her manner.

"Yes, sir," replied the woman, in a low, concealed voice, "if you are Mr. Walsford."

"I am," answered he. "From whom is this letter?" breaking the seal as he spoke.

"Desist, sir, for a few minutes," said the woman; "if you have any answer

for that letter, I shall be here at the same hour to-morrow." She moved away as she spoke.

"Stay, stay," cried Walsford, quickly. "Who are you? What is your meaning? Is this letter from yourself?"

"It is not, sir; I am only the bearer of it; and I shall be here again to-morrow at the same hour. Good morning, sir." She walked away, as if resolved to converse no more.

Walsford looked eagerly after her: she was closely veiled, but her figure was low and ungraceful, and her dress bespoke her of the common rank. Walsford gave but a transient glance: then, with some curiosity, opened his singularly-delivered letter.

" SIR,

" It is in vain I seek for a deprecating opening to this correspondence with you: I cannot excuse myself, unless under favour of a sentiment which must be powerful indeed to produce such a letter as this. I think, but find no form in which to address you. I have thrown all common ones aside; and the world, I believe, contains not a precedent to guide the step which I am now about to take. Let me then no longer attempt to screen my imprudence, but at once ask the bold and singular question—is your heart disengaged?—and tell me your opinion of a woman who could seriously demand such a confession?

" Treat this letter with indifference, if you feel so; but oh, I conjure you, hold

it not as a jest, nor expose to derision the sentiments of one who thinks but to approve of you. I write thus, might it be my pardon, only in consequence of your too proud idea of never loving, because you are poor.—Is then your heart disengaged? Answer me. I have gone too far not to earnestly request a reply.

"The bearer of this will wait for you on the hill to-morrow.

"A FRIEND."

Walsford read and re-read the letter; at first he wished to consider it in the light of a jest, but the singular manner of its delivery, and the no less singular, yet serious import of its contents, checked that first idea, and threw his mind into

into a most perplexed and confused train of reflection.

His day's sport was over; instead of keeping his eye on the game, he scarcely noticed the surrounding country, but wandered over the ground, lost in conjectures on his unknown correspondent, and the consequences which might follow the reality of such an adventure.

Even in a barrack-room, his habits had been moderate and simple; the pleasures of the mess, beyond the bounds of rationality, had never possessed a charm for him. The riotous mirth of intemperance he detested, and had ever shunned the degrading follies of its career; seeking rather the solitude of his barrack-room, where, with books and music, he had pleasantly whiled away the time, lost by his companions in

pleasures which bless the short hours of enjoyment, but curse the long days of reflection.

Often, when seated musing by his lonely fire, he had dreamed away an hour in romance, and felt that he had a heart, which sighed to exchange itself with some other fond and faithful one; but a bugle call, a roll of the drum, or the returning noise of his companions, would dissipate his reverie, and recall to recollection the bare walls of his barrack-room, its rude and scanty furniture, and the utter incapability of his means, to allow those visions of domestic bliss to be realized now, or perhaps ever.

On his return to Priorton, he encountered Miss Abbot on the lawn, who rallied him with his want of gallantry, in constantly absenting himself from morning

morning calls and visits; and asked if he had met a witch amongst the moors, to charm him into such a love of solitude.

Walsford fancied she looked sly and wicked, as she put the question. Could she be the writer of the letter, or the instigator of it?

She was pert, and pretended to be a great quizzer; and Walsford immediately remembered, that in a late party, she had made him look very embarrassed and confused, by saying aloud, amongst a group of young ladies—"Oh, never mind Walsford; we may set him down as an old bachelor; for he swears against marriage, because he is poor." She ran on with a great deal more nonsense of the same kind at his expence; and Walsford remembered to have met

at

at the moment a transient glance, which made his heart sigh in its core—"Oh that I had a throne!" but the eye turned coldly from him; and Walsford fled from all thoughts of beauty and of love.

Could then Miss Abbot be the unknown person who was thus playing on his credulity? He snatched the letter from his breast, and was about to tear it in disappointed anger, when the small delicate writing again met his eye; and he felt that it would cost him regret to have the illusion so disagreeably broken and discovered. He re-perused the letter; there was nothing in it either of irony or of flippancy—the style was simple and earnest; and Walsford decided that the writer of it had a heart which could feel. It could not then be Miss Abbot, for she seemed to be made

up

up of self-conceit and indifference. Satisfied on that, Walsford returned the letter to its former abode, and vainly strove, in the company at his uncle's table, to forget, amidst the gaieties of wine and conversation, his singular adventure of the morning.

To-morrow saw Walsford in still greater perplexity than yesterday had done. He was to write; but to whom? To a woman whose love might eventually not be agreeable to him, or to a jester who waited but his answer to deliver him up to overwhelming ridicule. —"And my heart disengaged?"

Walsford took two or three turns across his chamber, before he could answer the interrogation. He rubbed his brow, and thought of the eye which had turned in such cold beauty from his.

his. The recollection sufficed.—"Yes," said he, quickly, "my heart is disengaged;" and he breathed more freely when he had made the decision.

His gun was ready; his dog was gambolling beneath his window; nothing was wanting for his excursion but his reply; and certainly no man ever wrote a letter under greater perplexity than he did the following one:—

"MADAM,

"I shall not attempt to describe the sentiments which the honour of your letter of yesterday has given rise to in my breast; you must be aware that they could be properly expressed only at a personal interview.

"My heart has hitherto been disengaged;

gaged; for having neither rank nor fortune to offer, I determined to be poor alone, nor suffer myself to form an attachment which could only end in my own disappointment.

"If your letter to me was only a jest, you will laugh at this reply; if it had any other motive, be assured, that most sacred to me shall ever be the generous mind, which disdained not to favour one so destitute of every worldly consideration, as,

"MADAM,

"Your obliged,

"And devoted servant,

"EDMUND WALSFORD."

He slung his bag across his shoulder, and whistling on his dog, set out, with greater

greater alacrity than ever, for the moors. But never had Walsford shot so ill as on that morning; he was perpetually looking at his watch, and fancying that her wheels moved upon lead.

At last the minute-hand pointed to three, the assignation-hour; but although Walsford was burning with anxiety, he still feared a hoax, and kept out of sight of the appointed place ten or twelve minutes, when he came sauntering up with much seeming indifference. He found his muffled messenger faithful to her promise; she greeted him with an humble courtesy, to which Walsford replied, in an assumed careless tone—"Good morning, my friend! Pray tell me from whom you brought that letter of yesterday?"

"Sir, I told you before, that I only came

came to deliver the letter, and now to carry one from you."

"At least," said Walsford, "you will tell me if my correspondent be man or woman?"

"Surely, sir," replied she, in accents of astonishment, "the letter would answer that question!"

"Yes, if I am to take it in reality," answered Walsford; "but I have witnessed myself so many similar jokes played off on credulous fools, that I own I am a little dubious as to the truth of the letter which you delivered to me yesterday."

"You need not have any doubts upon the truth of that letter, sir," replied the woman, "nor fear that you are now the subject of a jest. If your letter be written with truth and honour

—pardon

—pardon me, sir, for the expression—you will yet be convinced that the one I conveyed to you expressed nothing but sincerity."

This answer interested Walsford more than ever; and again he conjured his new friend to tell him who was his correspondent, promising, at the same time, inviolable secrecy on her communication.

"No, sir," replied the woman, rather angrily; "an errand such as I have come on would not likely have been intrusted to one whose fidelity was not to be relied on."

"Be your message but as true as your fidelity, and I shall be satisfied," returned Walsford. "Here is an answer to the letter of your mistress; and as you seem acquainted with the subject

of

of our correspondence, it certainly cannot be indiscreet in you to tell me when I shall hear from her again."

"Perhaps to-morrow," answered the woman.

"Perhaps! no, it *must* be to-morrow," said Walsford, impatiently. "Promise—swear that you will be here to-morrow!"

"I can do neither, sir; but I am sure you will hear from my mistress again."

"By Heaven, if I do not," replied Walsford, with the most pointed energy, "every hour of my life will I devote to discover her! Tell her so—tell her she has begun our acquaintance, and if she bring it not to an explanation, it shall be mine to unravel it, were it hidden deep as the deepest seas!"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, sir," said the

the woman, alarmed at the vehement tone in which he spoke, "do not take any steps to discover my mistress. You must know, that it is not a subject fit for an uninterested tongue; and it would be ungenerous in you to injure one, whose only fault is this rash favour for you."

"Injure her!" repeated Walsford earnestly; "I would die before I would injure her! But I am on the rack, and if I writhe under torture, can you blame me?"

"I know not what to say, sir," replied the woman; "but I think it is probable I shall be here to-morrow."

"Heaven prosper you for that promise!" said Walsford. "Remember that neither peace nor rest will be mine, until I see you again. Stay—hark ye! is your

your mistress to be at the ball to-night?"

"I cannot answer, sir; I have said a great deal more than, upon reflection, I had any right to do. Good morning."

"Thou true tyrant," said Walsford, as the woman departed, "what I feel is uncared for."

She heard him, half-turned her head, and said—"Be at the ball then to-night, sir."

CHAP-

CHAPTER II.

THE town of Hartbury was within three miles of Priorton; it was a gay little place, and famed for its races, which took place every year, about the last days of September; and, like all other meetings of the same kind, there was a public dinner every day, and a ball every night, while they lasted. They were to commence in two days, and the ball given to-night was in honour of the earl of Hartbury's family, who had come down to their mansion-house there the preceding week.

Several of the company that was to attend

attend the races were arrived, and this ball was expected to be as gay as any of the immediately following ones. To it then in the evening did Walsford, with a most anxious heart, repair; he expected that some chance or intention would reveal to him his interesting correspondent: but his hopes were vain—all went on at the ball according to the common routine of life—nothing occurred there that bore the least semblance to romantic adventure; and Walsford, disappointed to the quick, again imagined that he might be the dupe of some impertinent jester, and at that moment the secret object of ridicule for his vain credulity.

In spite of himself, his spirits flagged; he felt no inclination to join the dancers; and as he was a man of no for-

tune, and of course little consequence, he sauntered about, as lonely and silent as he pleased.

She was there, however, the unknown friend of Walsford; she had passed him with a distant bow, to which consciousness had lent double coldness, and mingled in the crowd of the rich and caressed, leaving him behind, for whom she would have exchanged a kingdom.

The heart of Walsford was not more agitated than her own; she had committed an impropriety, on which she reflected, with shocked, yet only half-regretting amazement. She stood, in the midst of admirers, fair and dignified, retiring from the slightest approach of familiarity, and as pure and gentle in mind as in demeanour.

Yet she had written to Walsford;

and

and that secret knowledge kept for ever her downcast cheek suffused with blushes of self-humiliation. Her partners were unheeded; scarcely could she collect thought to answer the most common remark; she had bewildered herself, and shrunk in shame from the explanation which she had, of her own imprudent accord, drawn upon herself the apparent necessity of making. But how was she to be able to make that explanation? Her eye, with a stolen and dismayed glance, sought him for whom she had sacrificed so much. He leaned alone against a window-frame, wanting only wealth to be the pride of the ball-room. His gentle correspondent made not, however, that distinction, nor thought that worldly advantages could add a charm to him, who with the gifts of na-

ture alone, had first won her true and generous heart.

But would Walsford, whom she deemed faultless, respect her who had thus offered herself unsought?—there was a pang of degradation in that thought, which dearly punished all her sins against propriety. A cold bolt seemed to strike through her heart, and in the midst of that gay hall, the loveliest eyes there were suffused with tears: again they turned with soft despair to the favoured Walsford—his gaze was fixed upon her, but in the moment he withdrew it; while the modest look he so quickly shunned, fell to the ground beneath that dark and deep glance.

Walsford returned from the ball absent and dispirited; he had hoped to discover there his unknown correspondent,

dent, and the total failure of those vague expectations, had thrown him out of humour with himself, whose credulous belief he loaded with a thousand execrations: he threw himself into bed, convinced that he was the dupe of some satirist, and burning to avenge the ridicule to which he doubted not he had exposed himself.

Morning came, and found Walsford's spirit of adventure recovered in part from its last night's depression; he recalled to recollection—had he ever forgotten it?—the promise which his messenger had made to meet him again that day; and accordingly, with his faithful Carlo, he departed after breakfast for the hills.

Probably last night's dissipation had unsteadied Walsford's hand, at least so

he excused himself; but certainly this day's sport was worse, if possible, than yesterday's had been: the game flew up at his feet, but he did not fire one effective shot; even his dog seemed to wonder at the failure of his master's generally unerring aim, and ran back yelping to him, as if displeased that his services were of so little use.

At last Walsford fairly gave up, and threw himself down to wait, not patiently, for his anxiously-expected messenger. He lay amongst a little patch of trees that grew alone, not far from the place of assignation, which he could see, though himself unseen.

No living creature passed Walsford in his solitary watch, except some wild fowl, which now flew by him unharmed; while Carlo only growled at their flight, seeming

seeming to think it needless now, as matters stood, to rise from his comfortable position by his master's side.

Walsford counted every moment, and yet he was indignant with himself at his anxiety, when something before the usual hour, he descried his messenger of mystery coming along the hill. Walsford could not feign this time; he started up, and hurried to meet her, a feeling, as powerful as undescribable, swelling to tumult every pulse of his frame.—"Have you a letter?" asked he quickly.

"Yes, sir," and Walsford's hand shook as he received it. He tore open the seal, and with devouring eyes perused the contents.

"SIR,

"The sentiments expressed in your reply, assure me that my confi-

dence in your honour was not an ideal dependence, and that you will still answer me as candidly and generously as you have hitherto done. Let me here do myself the justice to declare, that for you alone has propriety ever had cause to be offended with my conduct; nor has that favour which your merit has won, ever been possessed by any of your sex before. In birth I am your equal—in fortune, the world might say superior; but I think not so; I only suppose that you would scorn to share wealth with her, who has thus stepped aside from the path of womanly reserve and decorum.

"The bearer will wait at the same place to-morrow.

"A FRIEND."

In

In vain Walsford tried to be calm: when he read this letter, a universal tremour agitated his whole frame, and he passed his hand across his brow, as if doubting the reality of what he saw, or the prudence of relying on the promise it held out. His colour went and came, and his lips involuntarily trembled, as he said to the woman who still lingered near—"Tell me, for God's sake, who is the writer of this letter?—Is it a jest?"

"I am too old, sir, to be the bearer of a jest," replied the stranger. "I have attended the writer of that letter since the day of her birth; her dying mother put her into my arms. Oh, sir, though I am a servant, I love her as if she were of my own blood! Pardon my freedom, but I implore you, by every thing sacred, not to deceive my young mistress, nor

mislead her further than you have done already."

"In your own words then," replied Walsford, "by every thing that is sacred, I would not deceive her for my life's value! But can I—God, can I believe you true! Do you know the contents of this letter?"

"I do in part," answered the woman; and her voice seemed to falter through agitation. "I alone am in the confidence of this extraordinary step of my mistress. I will not deny that, as far as my duty went, I dissuaded her from it; but your situation precluded, in a manner, all but distant acquaintance, and—and—she thought you worthy of this sacrifice of the dearest feelings of her mind."

"Great God," exclaimed Walsford, "I dream—

"I dream—surely I dream! Can it be I to whom these letters were intended—I, whose destiny seemed ever frowned on by fate? Have you not mistaken me for some happier man? This cannot—cannot be real; the world does not contain a heart so generous and matchless!"

"It does not contain such another, I am sure, sir," said the woman, no longer concealing that she wept; "and if you wound it by deceit or ingratitude——"

"If I wound it!" uttered Walsford, with solemn and tender energy—"if I wound that heart!"

Oaths would have been of little force, compared to the fervour and truth which breathed in that short sentence.

The woman looked at him a minute in silence; then slowly ejaculated—"God

bles you, and make you ever as happy and good as you are!"

"Happy!" repeated Walsford—"I am miserable, distracted, until I know your mistress. Are you to continue obdurate?—will you still conceal that name?"

"Do not ask me, sir; that name shall never pass my lips, nor, I trust, be ever breathed in discovery of this. You can reflect on the letter I have just given you, and I will be here to-morrow for your answer."

"And will you bring me a conclusive letter to-morrow?" asked Walsford.

"Not to-morrow, but the day following," was the reply.

"And I to remain in this state of suspense?" rejoined Walsford, hastily. "By heaven! you might as well tell me

me to go mad at once. I require no reflection—I am almost isolated in the world, and until now, believed myself as uncared for. Carry this reply to your mistress. Since she has trusted you, I can have no fear."

As he spoke, he took out his pocketbook, and tearing from it some leaves, began to write, while the woman said—"Your trust is not wrong placed, sir; you may consider your letter sealed for any sentiments you may please to express."

"They are my real ones," answered Walsford, as his pencil ran along the paper.

"MADAM,

"Pardon the liberty of so hasty a note, but I cannot exist beyond to-

to-morrow in ignorance of my most generous friend.

"To share wealth or poverty with such a heart as you seem to possess, would be to me a fate blessed as unequalled; but, madam, the latter is all the lot which has fallen to me, with scarcely even the prospect now of my sword carving out a better; nor could I come forward to devote myself to you, without your perfect knowledge of my situation.

"If our correspondence be not altogether an illusion, permit me to see you to-morrow, to pledge to you for ever the best affections of my heart, and to hear from your own lips that you will accept the faithful, but ungifted hand of

"EDMUND WALSFORD."

He

He wrapped the leaves in a blank page, and twisting them round, gave them to the woman, reiterating a thousand injunctions to her to be true, and early to her assignation of the following day.

At last they separated, and Walsford returned to Priorton, fit only to bury himself in some hermit's cell, to muse away the time undisturbed.

Now came a crowd of conjectures, that were ready to distract him. Who was she to whom he had just vowed away his freedom? What was the face which this mysterious incognito was to display to him? Was it one he had looked on with admiration, or one which had never yet attracted his glance? She had fortune, though some of the portioned girls in the neighbourhood had charms



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he rapturously kissed the
called on God to witness ho
attached he should be, to

sat lost in thought, no longer doubting the truth of his adventure, but in a perfect dream of his correspondent. He laid his head on the pillow—there came reflection busier than ever. He remembered one expression of his messenger —"My young mistress." It was delightful to rest securely on that sweet anchor; of itself alone it promised much; and as sleep stole slowly down upon him, the last waking thoughts of Walsford murmured with blessings—"My young mistress!—oh, my young mistress!"

The next morning, more eager than ever, Walsford repaired to the solitary hills, no longer attempting to shoot, but wandering, like a restless spirit, around the haunt of its departed joys.

But they were not departed to Walsford;

ford; and while he roamed with sickening impatience near the assignation place, it was anticipation of hope, not regret of its disappointments, that occasioned him such delirium of thought. He ascended the highest eminences, and cast his eyes to their farthest stretch of vision, to descry his anxiously-expected messenger. At last she appeared; and Walsford, with the speed of the fleet roe, bounded down the hills to meet her.

"My last message, sir," said the woman, presenting him a small parcel.

Walsford spoke not, but tore it open. It enclosed a fan, and a note, the latter of which first attracted Walsford's regard. It ran thus:—

"SIR,

"I have tried to write my name, but it stares me from the paper as a crime,

a crime, and I blot it out, as at least one offering to delicacy. Accept the enclosed fan. Should you be at the ball to-night, I shall drop a similar one to it at your feet, which will discover to you your correspondent, and enable you, in silence, to draw back perhaps from a disagreeable acquaintance.

"A FRIEND."

"She *will* be there?" demanded Walsford, with panting breath and sparkling eye.

"She will, sir.—And you?"

"If I be not there, seek me dead," answered Walsford; and incapable of holding farther conversation, he attempted not to detain the messenger, and she immediately departed.

Insensibly

Insensibly Walsford sank down on the turf; there was a feeling of bewilderment came across him, and a vague and tremulous fear, that made him almost shrink as the time drew near that was to discover this mysterious correspondent. He gazed upon the fan; it was of pure ivory, of the finest workmanship; a medallion of exquisite colours was painted in the centre, representing a sleeping Indian girl.—"Thou talisman," mentally ejaculated Walsford, as he lay on the grass, with his eyes fixed on the open fan—"thou talisman—what strange discovery is thy magic to unfold? Is thy pure texture an emblem of thy mistress's soul?—and are thy fair colours a token of her loveliness? Oh, speak, thou insensate, to the throbbing heart against which I press thee!—tell that palpitating

palpitating questioner, if love as well as gratitude will enslave its anxious pulses?"

Walsford fervently kissed the delicate fan as he uttered this rhapsody, and then depositing it in his breast, hurried home to Priorton, to think dinner tedious, the company insipid, and to fancy that the time of setting out for the ball was never to arrive.

CHAP-

Miss Abbot, and made himself so joyfully agreeable, that she forgot to scold him for breaking her fan.

The Priorton family were amongst the latest arrivals in the ball-room: dancing had already commenced, and several sets of quadrilles were on the floor as they entered.

Miss Abbot hung on Walsford's arm, and dragged him into the centre of all the gayest promenaders. His glance was like a wandering light, shooting restlessly in every direction, until it rested on a fair and graceful form, that moved like beauty through the airy mazes of the quadrille. The eyes of that lovely dancer and his met; she was turned in the instant away; and a sigh, that Walsford now thought next to a crime,

crime, deeply heaved the fan as it lay on his breast.

After the quadrilles were finished, a country-dance was formed, to which Walsford, as in duty bound, led Miss Abbot. They stood six or seven couples from the top, which was graced by the earl of Hartbury's eldest son, lord Glendon, and that fair girl, whom Walsford had long forbidden himself to look on, except when his eyes, forgetting all obedience, would wander to her in spite of their master's prohibition.

It was well for Walsford that he was naturally graceful in his movements: he was never much of a dancer; but that evening he was less active than ever; every body had to give him some directions, until assured at last that all assistance would be in vain to distract his at-

tention from his sole engrossing thought, he entreated Miss Abbot to compassionate him, and descend at once to the bottom of the dance.

Miss Abbot, in despair, as she told him, of his improvement, complied; and when there, led her reluctant partner to a couch, on which reclined lord Glendon and his lovely companion.

Miss Abbot, whose rank entitled her to associate with the first in the room, made up, in her usual confident manner, to her fair neighbour; but the lady, although an acquaintance, was not intimate, and rose the next minute to join the dance.—"Upon my word, Miss De Grey gets more insufferable every day," said Miss Abbot, in a mortified tone: "they call her reserved; she is quite arrogant;

arrogant; I do not think she even bowed to you, Walsford."

"She did not," answered he; "but my acquaintance with Miss De Grey is so slight, that she might forget it without any intention of arrogance."

"No, no, I have no idea of any such forgetfulness," said Miss Abbot, consequentially; "it is a piece of ill-breeding of which I never allow myself to be guilty. Oh, here is that odious monster, Andrewes, coming this way. I am sure it is to ask me——Do let us appear to be talking busy, not to perceive him."

"Could you have an idea of such ill-breeding?" said Walsford, archly, as his companion turned her face to him in apparent interest.

Miss Abbot laughed, and had just opened her lips to reply, when Mr. An-

drewes came up, and undaunted by her seemingly-close confabulation with Walsford, thrust his perfumed head into her face, and requested her hand for the next quadrille set.

Miss Abbot turned her eyes to Walsford: he looked wickedly blank; he could not dance quadrilles; and Miss Abbot, with sad and slow steps, walked away with a partner, whose one shoulder was higher than the other.

Walsford was ungallant enough to feel relieved by her absence, and keeping himself aloof from the dancers, he sauntered through the rooms, seeking the unknown friend, whose presence was to be revealed to him that most eventful and anxious night.

The hours fled on. Still Walsford was on the rack of suspense and expectation.

tation. No fan was dropped near him, and in dread of being farther disappointed, his spirits lost their tone, his conversation its gaiety, and a feeling of depression stole over him, that saddened the natural vivacity of his countenance.

In a rather melancholy posture, he leaned against the door-way of one of the refreshing-rooms, hope had almost forsaken him, and his eyes, in gloomy gravity, were listlessly fixed on the floor. Some one touched him in passing from the interior; it was lord Glendon leading Miss De Grey, on whose steps he had hung in admiration the whole evening.

The rich robes of the lady brushed lightly against Walsford as she moved along. She was almost close to him, and the fair jewelled neck heaved for a second under his very eye.

Walsford crushed his arm upon his heart, and his glance, in tumultuous disobedience, followed that lovely form. She was but a step from him, when something fell from her hand. It was a fan! The blood rushed boiling through Walsford's veins. He sprung to pick it up—he opened it. Heaven and earth! it was the sleeping Indian! The lights reeled before Walsford; his limbs, in the delicious transport, lost their power; and in a death of bliss, he sank for a moment motionless against the supporting door-way.

The trembling Hester meantime hurried lord Glendon from the conscious spot; she durst not cast a backward glance to him she idolized, but nearly sinking, through the pangs of outraged modesty, sometimes thought it would

be

be happy for her, could she sink through the earth, and hide herself from what she had done. She took her place in the dance, and it had begun ere she was able to lift her timid eyes from the ground. Involuntarily they took the direction where she had left Walsford; he had advanced, and was standing intently regarding her. Her cheek crimsoned in his gaze, and her dark lashes sunk again ere they had half arisen.

Walsford had waited but for this look. Irresolute whether to believe himself in a dream, or to trust to the reality of the rapture that was thrilling him, he had lingered near this lovely blusher, to watch for one acknowledging glance, before he ventured what, the minute before, he had fancied beyond his utmost daring. The half look and blush of

Hester De Grey stamped the real bliss of his fate, and in the second instant he was by her side.

The fan was still in his hand, and his eye fell like her own, as he falteringly uttered—"Have I picked up your fan, Miss De Grey?"

Hester spoke not, nor looked up, but she stretched her hand, and took hold of the fan. It was gently but firmly retained, and Walsford again said—"May I call with it to-morrow?"

Had Hester's life depended on her words, she could not then have articulated one syllable. Her bosom fluttered in an agony of shame, and her head drooped like a young rose on her blushing neck. Walsford was convinced; he saw the cruelty of his further presence; and apprehensive of prying eyes, he retired

tired to some distance, and abstracted from all beside, gazed only and for ever on this dearest creature of his secret, and once hopeless love.

They spoke no more that night, but a thousand times their eyes met; and though Hester's glances were but the stolen lightnings of an instant, there was a sweet tenderness flashed through them, that made Walsford literally delirious with rapture.

When the ball and Hester had faded from his sight, and he had retired to the privacy of his own chamber, the recollections of the past evening came upon him with such a flood of wondering transport, that again he was tempted to believe himself the victim of some enchanting delusion, until he drew the two fans from his breast; and contem-

plating them in ecstacy, ejaculated—"It is true! Great God, retain my senses!"

It was no wonder though Walsford was nearly mad; love, beauty, and wealth, like the unexpected favours of Heaven, were about to fall to his share; and he found himself on the brink of enjoying a happiness, which, in his wildest visions, he had never once dreamed of possessing.

On Walsford's first arrival at Priorton, his admiration had early fallen on Hester De Grey. She and her cousin, Louisa Morden, were the co-heiresses of a wealthy uncle, and the orphan wards of sir Gregory Delval, at whose house they resided. It was generally said that these two young girls had succeeded to upwards of three hundred thousand pounds between them; and with such wealth,

wealth, joined to birth, beauty, and accomplishments, they were looked upon as entirely beyond the views of private men.

Walsford, then a lieutenant on half-pay, obtruded neither his attentions nor acquaintance; from the station of his uncle's family, he frequented the highest circles in the neighbourhood, and, in consequence, was often in company with these two lofty heiresses; but as he was unassuming, and unwilling to be forward, and the ladies distant in their manner to him, a bow of recognition was generally all that passed between them. Miss Morden's distance proceeded really from considering him entirely out of her notice; but Hester De Grey's reserve was the offspring of timid love and apprehension alone.

It is useless to attempt to define the causes of a prepossession; it is a sympathy that belongs entirely to the heart, and with which, reason has nothing to do.

Walsford's countenance was pleasing to Hester, from the first moment she beheld it, and each succeeding interview stamped more firmly the favourable impression. Her heart had often been sought, and never been won; now it gave itself unasked; and all that was tender, ingenuous, and confiding in woman, became the possession of Walsford, when he, so unknowingly to himself, captivated the affections of the lovely Hester De Grey.

Hester knew fully the different situations of Walsford and herself, and was sensible, from his unobtrusive deport-

ment

ment and humble fortunes, that he would never come forward as a suitor to her, even should he love her; and Hester, as she thought over that last sentence, remembered the looks of Walsford, which she had at times caught fixed on herself, as if the world had contained no other light for them.

A warmer tide would rush through the fond heart of Hester at these recollections, and a voice would seem to say, in its inmost recesses—"Seek him who loves, yet cannot seek you."

"I will," said Hester, starting up for the thousandth time from one of those dear and perplexing ruminations. "I will do what none else have done for man before! There is a look in that dark serious eye, which speaks all truth and

and faith to those who confide in it. Be steady then, heart, nor falter to attain thy haven!"

Such was the blissful fate which destiny had in secret been weaving for the favoured and unhoping Walsford.

On the following morning, Walsford repaired for the first time to the superb mansion of sir Gregory Delval. It was early for a visit there; "but what has love to do with fashion?" thought he, as he rapped at the door, and inquired for Miss De Grey.

He was ushered up to a splendid apartment. It was empty, but in the next minute, light footsteps approached the door, and Hester entered. She stopped on the threshold, as if struck trembling with shame; and as Walsford

sprang

sprang to meet her, buried her burning face in both her hands.

Walsford threw himself at her feet, and for a moment clasped her knees in silent ecstacy. When he did speak, was it coherently? It matters not—love has a language, that suits no tongue but its own; and Hester's tears of rapture fell over the acknowledgment that she had been the first and only object of Walsford's love, adored in secret and despair.

Allowed to love, Walsford proved himself no cold lover; he hurried, with an ardour that would not brook to be retarded, through all the forms necessary to make Hester irrevocably his own; and while he hung on that enchanting eye, which yet could not rise beneath his, he fancied that Nature itself

self stood still to tantalize him with delay.

The family at Priorton heard of his union with Hester De Grey in astonishment almost confounding. Mr. Abbot, with his usual sarcasm, congratulated Walsford on his modesty, and bade him take out a patent for a new way of being bashful. Miss Abbot declared him to be the most consummate of hypocrites; and to prove her accusation, instanced his denying almost an acquaintance with Miss De Grey, at a time when, as matters had since transpired, he must have been her accepted lover. As for sir Gregory Delval, it surprised away from him a fit of the gout; and as he retired from his conference with Walsford, he said to his confidential valet, looking very blue—"Eh, eh, Joseph,

seph, how long has this young fellow been visiting here?"

"Never until yesterday, your honour."

"Eh, eh, never until yesterday!" said sir Gregory. "Why, Joseph, he is Mr. Abbot's nephew, the young man I have mentioned to you as being too reserved. Eh, eh, bless my soul, Joseph, your shy lads are deep ones now-a-days."

When Walsford's happy fortune became publicly known, all said he was a bolder man than he had appeared to be; Hester was generally condemned for making so imprudent a marriage; whilst her lover was held up as the luckiest and most daring fellow in the universe.

Walsford faithfully kept the beloved secret; he was united to Hester De Grey,

Grey, and in his fond and grateful arms, the wife had never cause to regret the condescension of the maid.

THE LOVER AND THE TWO FRIENDS.

THE LOVER AND THE TWO FRIENDS.

CHAPTER I.

I WISH I could paint Laura Dillon in the charming light which belonged to her sweet form and sweeter heart; but it is useless to attempt what one is sure to fail in, or at best portray only a faint shadow of what should be rich, vivid, and full of all delightful reality.

This lovely Laura was an orphan ward of sir George Worsely; his house was her home; and under the cherishing affection

fection of him and his lady, she had never felt that friendless state which the loss of parents so generally creates.

Her guardian had no family of his own, but a niece of lady Worsely's constantly resided with them; and an orphan, like Laura, from her earliest years, the two girls had been brought up as inseparably together as if they had been sisters. They were companions, however, more through habit than similarity of disposition; but as yet too little acquainted with life, or the world, they knew not the different impulses which lay hid in the minds of each, to be awakened into energy when experience or circumstances should disturb the hitherto quiet of their youth. They were both independent; and happy, admired, caressed, existence was to them one

uninterrupted

uninterrupted round of pleasure and joy.

Sophia Harwood was a dazzling beauty; nature seemed to have formed her for an ornament, and Sophia chose her sphere of brilliancy in the gay halls of fashion—to sparkle like a star wherever she appeared, and to rivet the eyes and tongues of men beneath her power. Laura mixed in these scenes too, with a less splendid eclat perhaps to strangers than Sophia; but to friends, and those who knew her well, there was an interest in her manner, and a gentleness and sensibility in her words and looks, that threw the brilliant Sophia and her heedless raillery into deep and disproving shade. Sophia never wearied, where mirth, dancing, and adulation, were to be enjoyed; she was only languid at the fireside

fireside at home, and yawned when other topics than dress, balls, and beaux, were introduced in conversation.

Laura mingled in the crowded rooms, and received her share of admiring attention along with Sophia; but her smile was cold to her flatterers; and her last steps in the ball-room were ever more welcome to her than her first; and then it was her delight to sit the long evening alone with lady Worsely, and to be as absent from the gay world in conversation as she was in presence.

But this, after all, may be an unfair comparison for Sophia. There are causes for all things, and if Laura's spirits were listless and uncaptivated in company, it might be that some object was wanting, in whose influence they placed their buoyancy. And so in truth it was—the British

British Channel rolled between her and young Everard, and absent from him, gaiety was fatiguing, and pleasure incapable of affording enjoyment. She danced, but Everard was not her partner; and when the voice of praise or tenderness breathed in her ear, it only made her sigh with disappointment that it was not his accents she heard.

Devoted to her lover, and naturally fond of home, Laura, after her engagement with Everard, found it wearisome to enter crowds that seemed to mock the tenderness of her feelings, and interfere with the faith her recollection owed to her absent friend. She could have lived secluded as a nun, to think of Everard, and anticipate the happiness of those years that were to mark her life when united to him; but too modest

to give publicity to an engagement that was yet but known to her most particular friends, she shrunk from awakening remarks on her conduct, by any attempt at withdrawing from the circles she had hitherto frequented; but still, when she could avoid a gay party, she ever gladly seized the opportunity, nor desired society or splendour, beyond the mild and amiable lady Worsely and her kind and comfortable fireside.

Lady Worsely's health was delicate, and did not admit of her going much into company; on the plea of remaining with her, Laura sometimes got off an engagement; and lady Worsely, who knew the reason of her wish for retirement, did not reject a request that was pleasing and agreeable to both.

It was in these evenings that Laura

was happy. Lady Worsely talked of Everard, of their approaching union, and the duties which should mark the character of a wife.

Laura said not much, but her frequent blushes, her downcast eyes, and the pauses she would make in her work, showed how deeply her heart was interested in the conversation. Then, as lady Worsely expatiated on the submission which the married state exacts from the wife, and the meekness and cheerfulness with which she should endeavour to sooth the asperities which the husband's ruder passage through life may produce, the bosom of Laura would palpitate, her eyes would start full of tears, and in a voice low and tremulous, with tender emotion she would

exclaim—" He will be my sole thought —I shall live but to please him!"

The engagement between Laura and Everard had subsisted through two long years of absence on the lover's part; but neither time nor distance had weakened the attachment on her side; and on his it seemed to continue more ardent each letter that he wrote.

At the commencement of that period, Laura was spending the summer months with a near relation of her own, in the country. Adjacent to his estate was that of Everard, who being a frequent visitor at Mr. Commeline's, soon yielded his heart a captive to the gentle and lovely Laura. Everard was as amiable as herself; and interested by his agreeable manners and undisguised partiality to herself, Laura sought not to repress the

the feeling of tenderness which he was exciting in her bosom. It was the first sentiment of warmer affection than friendship that she had ever known, and in all the faith and sincerity of her pure and guileless heart, she bestowed a preference on Everard, that, with fond fidelity, wove itself inseparably round each thought, each hope of her existence. Too generous to desire to inflict pain even on the meanest of creation, how then could Laura attempt to torture the man she loved with the unfeeling wiles of a coquette? Everard avowed his love, and read in her modest blushes the approval which her timid lips durst not venture to confess.

The friends of both sanctioned the attachment; but Everard being a minor of nineteen, and Laura but little past

her sixteenth year, an immediate union was strongly objected to, by those who had a right to decide for, or to advise the young couple; and the original intention that Everard should make the *tour* of the continent during the interval of his coming of age, was urged to be put into execution.

Everard reluctantly agreed to the plan he had recently been so anxious to pursue. His marriage, at present, every voice, that had an interest in his affairs, was raised to declare against; the friends of Laura were equally averse to her entering into matrimony at so early an age; but as neither parties could object, nor wished to object, to an attachment so suitable on both sides, the young lovers were permitted to engage themselves to each

each other, and to correspond during the absence of Everard.

They parted, and Everard was most faithful to the dear indulgence of being allowed to write to Laura; his letters breathed love and constancy in every line. If hers were more reserved in their expressions of attachment, it was because the modest eye of a woman overlooked the page, and the heart that dictated it shrunk, in its delicate dignity, from acknowledging, even to him it had vowed itself to, all the deep tenderness of its truth.

The period of Everard's absence was now approaching to its close; the commendations of his travelling tutor were every thing that could be desired in favour of a young man. His estate waited to come into his hands, perfectly un-

 encumbered,

encumbered, and capable of procuring for him all the comforts of elegant life. The prospects of Laura were rapturous to herself, and pleasing to all who wished her well. No obstacle was now to prevent their union; he was coming, to whom her sole affections were devoted. No doubt, no fear, disturbed those delightful sensations; she felt but happiness, and anticipated only the bliss of the destiny that was to make her the wife of Everard.

CHAPTER II.

His last letter from the Continent arrived; it was dated Paris, and he was to start for England the following day All was now expectation at sir George Worsely's; Laura, agitated with a thousand tender, yet overpowering sensations of joy, could hardly restrain the feelings of her heart at the near approach of her lover; every knock at the door, or unexpected step, started each nerve into tremulous palpitation, and made her soft, tell-tale cheek, burn and blanch alternately with the violence of her emotion.

Sophia, who was a stranger to Everard, and devoid of those gentler feelings which make love or friendship so sweet, beheld, with indifference, the anxiety of Laura—smiled at the idea of being careless of the world for the sake of one person—and secretly wondered if Everard would be so engrossed with Laura, as not to have any admiration for her.

It so chanced, that the afternoon of Everard's arrival, Laura and Sophia happened to be alone together in the drawing-room. As the carriage drew up at the door, Sophia ran to the window, and watching the appearance of the stranger as he alighted, exclaimed—"It is he, Laura!—oh yes, I am sure it is Everard—he is so handsome!"

A thrill of conscious and poignant ecstacy

ecstacy ran through each beating artery in Laura's frame; she sunk back on her chair, in emotion almost dying; a quick step ascended the stairs; she scarcely respired as she heard it; her heart swelled to pain with tumultuous throbs of love, joy, and bashfulness. She could not meet him in the presence of another! Oh no!—and impelled by the feeling, she rushed suddenly into the anti-room. As Sophia looked after her in astonishment, she scarcely attended to the opening of the door, until she found herself clasped in a fervent embrace, and a voice in the softest tenderness, exclaim—"My Laura—my love!" She attempted to turn her head, but in the instant she was caught closer to the stranger's breast, and before she could speak, his

lips had impressed on hers, a long and passionate kiss.

"Oh, Heavens!" cried Sophia, the moment she was able to articulate.

"Oh, Heavens!" echoed the stranger, as he perceived his mistake.

The beauty of Sophia was at that moment absolutely resplendent; the unexpected embrace had thrown an air of alarmed modesty over her whole appearance, that added an irresistible interest to her charms, and her eyes, startled and flurried, sparkled in perfect lustre with their looks of astonishment. For a minute both stood opposite each other, in confounded silence, when the stranger said—"How can I apologize, madam? I entreat you to pardon me; the—the mistake was entirely unintentional; I supposed it was——I imagined I was

I was in the presence of an acquaintance." He hesitated, as at a loss how to explain the cause of such an extraordinary mode of address.

Sophia, who by this time had partly overcome her confusion, and rightly guessed the occasion of the mistake, smiled, yet with a downcast blush, and replied—" Mr. Everard, I presume?—Miss Dillon is in that room;" and pointing to the door by which Laura had retreated, she hurried to depart by the one at which he had entered.

She did not see him again until she descended to dinner, when she was introduced to him in form: a deep blush dyed her cheeks; nor could she raise her eyes for the time. Everard reddened too, and made his bow in utter silence.

Conversation

Conversation depended chiefly on sir George and lady Worsely for support. Laura was too happy, and too timidly conscious of the situation she stood in, with regard to Everard, to trust as yet to the firmness of her voice. He was silent, from a motive similar probably to that of her own; and Sophia, whose spirits were never wont to fail in company of that sex she was accustomed to enslave, had unaccountably to-day lost her vivacity, nor made one single attempt at her gay raillery, whose only attraction lay in the ruby lips that gave it utterance.

Everard was constantly at sir George Worsely's; yet only a few days since his arrival had elapsed, when Laura's gentle heart no longer beat to happiness unalloyed with doubt. What should have

have caused this altered sensation in her sweet breast? It was not a change in her own sentiments; they still were devoted, in all the purity and unstained faith of virgin love, to Everard alone. The inconstancy of man wrought the change. Everard, until now, had never seen Sophia Harwood; the singularity of their first interview had impressed her beauty on his sight, with an interest that seemed to enchant his senses; the first look of her beauty dazzled him with its splendour, and the oftener he beheld her, the more he gazed on her with admiration, as surpassing all the ideas he had ever formed of female loveliness.

The passion that had stood the test of time, absence, and variety, yielded to the ravishing beauty of Sophia, and with such

such sudden mutability, that it appeared to partake more of infatuation than of reason. The union with Laura, to which he had so lately looked forward with rapture, no longer excited his anxiety; he recollected his engagement with despair; he was bound beyond the honour of man to retrieve; he dared not imagine the success of this new passion; he had only to determine that his promise should be fulfilled, and then die in silence and in secret for the beauteous and bewitching Sophia.

In this last supposition, however, Everard deceived himself. Sophia already perceived her power; and so dear was conquest to her, that even her knowledge of the tie betwixt him and Laura could not restrain her desire to excite his admiration. Nor did this wish

proceed

proceed entirely from the spirit of coquetry alone; there was a feeling of preference in her encouragement of Everard's wandering attentions; and without reflecting beyond the pleasure it gave herself, she exerted all the wiles she was mistress of to captivate the betrothed lover of her friend.

Her blandishments raised Everard's passion to distraction; ignorant of hypocrisy, he knew not how to dissemble the repugnance which warred with his honour towards fulfilling his engagement with Laura. His marriage with her was settled to take place immediately after his coming of age; it wanted but a fortnight to that period; every day that advanced it added torture to his thoughts; and sometimes, nearly mad with the violence of his hidden emotions,

tions, he was inclined to throw himself at the feet of Sophia, and seek for death at her hand, since fate had decreed that he was to live without her.

Totally engrossed with Sophia, Everard fancied that his inconstancy was known only to himself; he no longer watched the eye of Laura, or it would have told him his vacillation was discovered; her sweet countenance had ceased to be the object of his gaze; and in the splendour of Sophia's cheek, her soft and delicate one grew paler still, nor attracted his recreant regard.

Attached to Everard, to the exclusion of every object in his presence, but himself, Laura, whose very soul dwelt bashfully on his every word and look, had observed, almost from the first, his change towards her. The blushes that his ardent

dent gaze had once used to bring to her happy cheek were now over; his eyes no longer sought hers; incessantly fixed on Sophia, they seemed to have forgotten their once-loved resting-place; or if by chance they turned to her, their expression was so altered from what they had once conveyed, that she shuddered at the conviction her heart was assuming, and at length admitted the agonizing apprehension of Everard's inconstancy. It was in vain she endeavoured to beguile herself with the belief that he still loved her—each coming day proved more and more that it was now but a false delusion she cherished, and that though her heart should break, Everard's would no longer participate in its sorrow.

Some of his mother's jewels he had ordered

ordered to be reset for his expected bride; when finished, they were sent to him at sir George Worsely's, as directed; they arrived one day as the party sat at table after dinner, and a servant entered the room to deliver them to their owner.

Everard immediately recognised the casket: he changed colour; and as he extended his hand, it shook involuntarily; when drawing it suddenly back, he turned his head away, and coldly desired the servant to put it on another table.

This cruelly careless behaviour of Everard fell like a bolt of ice on the heart of Laura: she had tried to deceive herself that she still possessed his affections—that she but dreamed they were estranged from her. This unreflecting action

action proved how real was the destruction of her happiness, and the mockery of faith that was returned for all the fond fidelity of her unchanging truth. A cold shivering ran through her frame; her eyes grew dim; and terrified lest she should faint from her chair, she caught up a glass of wine, and attempted to taste it; but her lips refused to open, and her trembling hand upset the glass. It was sir George Worsely's she had lifted instead of her own; and he, ignorant of what was going on, rallied her without reserve on the cause of her confusion, and desired Everard to try how the chains fitted.

The agony of Laura while sir George thus jested, was worse than death. She spoke not, and her pale and motionless

countenance

countenance appalled Everard that she suspected his treachery.

Sophia hastened to seize the neglected casket, and opening it, displayed the glittering gems. She scarcely doubted Everard's apostacy to Laura, yet, without a feeling for her, she clasped on the necklace, and gayly asked him if he did not think it too long?

For a moment, Everard's conscious eye dared not venture to look up; but upon Sophia's repeating the question, he turned to reply, and in the white bosom and bewitching smile that solicited his notice, forgot at once all compunctious reflection. A tide of ecstatic admiration rushed to his bosom; he snatched one of the bracelets, but instead of clasping it on her arm, he caught her hand, and imprinted upon it a kiss so long and ardent,

dent, that Sophia, with a look of apprehension, hastily disengaged it from his hold; and, as she did so, stole a doubtful glance at Laura.

Laura saw all; but she was unable to move—scarcely to breathe.

Lady Worsely, who had been for some little time inwardly suspecting the wavering state of Everard's affections, perceived with sorrow the sinking situation of Laura, and indignant at the cause, advanced to her niece, and with asperity said—"Put off those ornaments, Sophia; you use Mr. Everard with very little ceremony in thus opening his parcel."

"Have I offended, sir?" asked Sophia, in a timid, beseeching voice, casting a sweet and transient glance at Everard; "if I have, pray forgive me;" and unclasping

unclasping the necklace, she put it into his hand. As she did so, her fingers by chance rested for a second on his: he started through every nerve—the tone, the look, the touch, excited him to frenzy—the necklace fell unheeded to the ground, and unmindful longer of the world besides herself, he faltered out as if his soul overflowed at the words—"Sophia!—oh, bid me die for you!"

A blush of conscious alarm dyed the face of Sophia at this open display of his infidelity; she shrunk, frightened at the power she had so treacherously acquired; and as the impulse that had impelled the declaration subsided into reason, Everard appeared overwhelmed with agitating confusion.

"Heigh!"

"Heigh!" cried sir George, staring with surprise.

For an instant lady Worsely was confounded; then quickly said—"Upon my word, Mr. Everard, those continental manners will not do here. If they are deemed requisite now-a-days for young men of fashion, they must be displayed in another house than this. I am sorry you found any one in this family disposed to be treated with such ridicule."

The sharp tone in which her ladyship spoke completely aroused Everard from his trance of forgetfulness; he remembered with horror the insult he had just offered to Laura, and turned to her an anxious and apprehensive glance. A momentary strength had enabled her to fly from a scene of such agony; she was

just passing the door when she looked back; her eyes met Everard's, as they wandered in search of her. She gazed at him for an instant, as if her eyes were fixed in death, without anger, without reproach, but deep with unutterable anguish; and as she lingered on that parting glance, her light figure, half hid in the shade of the door, and her pale, ashy pale, face, gave her the appearance of a lovely, faded phantom, mourning over the ruins of its departed happiness.

She disappeared, and as Everard still gazed on the now vacant doorway, the conviction that he had lost her, and of the barbarity and worthlessness of his own conduct, smote through his heart, as if a thousand daggers had been lanced at its core. A sensation of dismay accompanied the idea that Laura had discovered

covered his inconstancy; and too embarrassed to recover immediately his ease, he received the condemning raillery of lady Worsely, without having the power to utter one single word in reply.

"Eh! how is this?" said sir George, perceiving something was wrong; "have Laura and you quarrelled?"

"She is all goodness," stammered Everard.

"I did not accuse *her*," rejoined sir George, and he directed a glance of inquiring wonder at his wife.

Lady Worsely, not supposing the dereliction of Everard to be so complete as it really was, wished rather to smooth over the circumstance, than to give it additional weight by farther notice; she forced a laugh at the amazement of her

husband, as she replied—" Sir George is always ready to run the gauntlet for Laura; but I fancy my services will be of more use at present. She has been languid all this day, and looked so ill, as she withdrew, that I fear she exhausted herself by remaining with us so long."

She moved to leave the room, and stooped to pick up the necklace, that still lay unheeded on the floor. Everard started forward to relieve her of the trouble; but her ladyship was beforehand, and as she presented them to him, she said, in a very pointed manner—" You neglect your *jewels* sadly, Mr. Everard."

He understood the application, and reddening at the rebuke it contained, his

his eyes sunk beneath hers in silence, as she passed on with Sophia from the apartment.

CHAPTER III.

As they entered the drawing-room, lady Worsely said, in a tone of reproof, to her niece—"I was glad, Sophia, that our party contained no strangers to-day —I was ashamed of your conduct to Mr. Everard; such coquetry was degrading to yourself, and inhuman in the extreme to Laura."

Sophia defended herself like a fool—she could not help it—she did not mean any harm—all gentlemen paid compliments to ladies—she had behaved only as other people did—was Laura to be offended if Mr. Everard treated the rest

of

of the company with common politeness?

Lady Worsely interrupted her string of silly vindications, and irritated at the unfeeling senselessness she displayed, assured her, that if she dared pursue such conduct with Mr. Everard, or attempt to interfere with his attentions to Laura, she would forfeit for ever the esteem of sir George and herself, and should be sent from the house until the marriage was over. She did not wait for any reply from the disconcerted Sophia, but hastened to seek the apartment of Laura. She tapped gently at the door, and a low suppressed voice bade her enter.

"Are you ill, dear Laura?" asked lady Worsely, anxiously, as she ap-

proached the bed where her young friend was reclining.

"A little of a headache, madam," replied Laura, turning away her face from sight.

"I feared you were indisposed," rejoined lady Worsely; "but not seriously, I hope."

"No, not much," answered Laura, evidently struggling to repress the tremour of her voice.

"You will come down to tea, my love? It will perhaps cure your headache."

"I would rather not," replied Laura, faintly.

"Do, my love," said lady Worsely, with entreaty; "society will revive you from this languor. We will have tea immediately."

"Dear

"Dear madam, I cannot," replied Laura, scarcely heard; "allow me to remain here. I have a sad pain."

The deep earnestness with which she added the last sentence, affected lady Worsely; she stooped down, and tenderly kissed Laura's half-hidden brow—it was burning hot.—"My dear child," cried she, in alarm, "I fear you are worse than you say: your forehead is like fire."

"You will make me more uneasy if you distress yourself about me," answered Laura. "It is merely a headache, and a little quiet will relieve it."

"Do you think you would sleep if left alone?" asked lady Worsely.

"I do not know," replied Laura, after a pause, and in a very low voice.

"You make me really anxious, my love. I will sit by you."

"No, dear madam—no, you must not," answered Laura, earnestly; "pray go down stairs; it would make me quite uncomfortable to detain you here. I will try to sleep."

Lady Worsely shortly after departed; she believed that solitude, for an hour or so, would most conduce to relieve Laura, as she did not doubt that her chief ailment lay on her mind, and that the strange conduct of Everard was the sole cause of her present distress. Once or twice she had nearly mentioned him; but apprehensive that Laura might be still more hurt by supposing that another than herself had suspected his desertion, she checked the desire before it found utterance, sincerely hoping and trusting

trusting that the present uneasiness would pass over in suspicion alone.

As her ladyship descended from Laura, she met the gentlemen at the drawing-room door. As they entered, Everard looked round, evidently in search of Laura, and appeared irresolute to ask the cause of her absence. He did not venture to approach Sophia, but seated himself at a distance from her, dejected and self-condemned.

Neither lady Worsely's spirits nor approbation was raised by her interview with Laura; she was grave, and felt so angry, that in her constrained attempts to be civil, her displeasure was only the more perceptible.

Sophia was frightened to look up; luckily she found a card on the mantelpiece beside her, and busy in tearing and

twisting it into matches, she rolled them up and down without intermission.

When tea was handed round, sir George instantly inquired after Laura.

"She has been obliged to lie down with a violent headache," replied lady Worsely.

Everard's conscience suffered such a pang, that the cup shook in his hand; he cast a diffident, alarmed glance at her ladyship, and faltered out—"Is she so ill?—Will she not come down?"

"No, sir," answered lady Worsely, gravely; "she is too much indisposed to appear again in company this evening."

Sir George, who was particularly fond of Laura, asked many questions about her, and unaroused to the vacillation of Everard, rallied him on his pensive looks in the absence of his mistress.

It was well for Everard that such a cause could be ascribed for the depression and disorder that appeared in his manner; he was absorbed in a tumult of agonizing reflection; his broken faith—his endangered honour—his perjury to her to whom he had vowed his fidelity—his frantic passion for Sophia, and all that must be trampled on before it could be gratified, rushed in such wild and impetuous war through each thrilling recollection, that he felt as if his brain would go distracted in the torturing perplexity of his mind.

Sophia sat opposite to him; he ventured not to address her, but sometimes he would meet her stolen look. Those lovely fugitive glances were more dangerous than her open smiles; he felt their enchantment to madness; yet ever

the parting gaze of Laura arose to his memory, and seemed to come, in its deep anguish, between him and the gay and dazzling glances of Sophia. But wretched even in her presence, he sought refuge in flight, and in the cold good-night of lady Worsely, read the beginning of that obloquy which inconstancy ever heaps upon its unhappy victim.

He was no sooner departed than lady Worsely repaired again to the chamber of Laura. She was lying quiet, but as the curtain was gently drawn back, she looked up and said—"Is it you, dear madam?"

"Have I disturbed you, my love?" asked lady Worsely. "How are you now?—better I hope?"

"My head aches still," replied Laura, "but it is colder now," and she took hold

hold of lady Worsely's hand to press it on her brow."

"It is too hot still, my love. Have you slept since I left you?"

"No, not any," answered Laura, with a half-suppressed sigh.

"You would have been better down stairs with us," rejoined lady Worsely; "we all missed you much."

"Do you think so?" said Laura, faintly.

"Surely, my love; there was Everard quite melancholy all the evening."

"I do not wish him to be melancholy," said Laura: her heart seemed to burst in the words, and she turned her face on the pillow and pressed it hard.

Lady Worsely sat down on the bedside. Laura was her darling, and her heart bled to see her suffer.—"Your diamonds

diamonds are beautiful," said she, anxious to talk, as if all was right betwixt Everard and her; "we must be careful to select a bridal robe to match them, and not allow Everard to have all the taste on his side—bride and jewels."

Laura half rose from the pillow, and with startling energy, said—"I shall never be his bride, lady Worsely!"

"My child, you dream! In a few weeks you will be the happiest of brides, united to a man who has loved you so long."

Laura's head was again buried on the pillow, but her sobs could no longer be controlled.

Lady Worsely took her hand anxiously.—"What has thus discomposed you, my child? You were used to be steady

steady and sincere. What change is this to Everard?"

"Oh no, no—I am not changed!" cried Laura, through her tears; "but ——" she paused, then, with a sudden burst of despair, added—"Everard is changed."

"Laura, you alarm and disappoint me; when have you become whimsical? what foolish fancy is this you have imbibed, on the eve of marriage with a man who has proved his constancy through an absence so long and distant?"

Lady Worsely spoke more sternly than she felt; and Laura, deceived by her manner, hesitated to reply.—"You are under an error, be assured," pursued her ladyship; "Everard's affections are as warmly yours as ever. Have you not told me, a thousand times, that he

was the most generous, the most honourable, and the truest of men? Would you, for the fancy of a moment, strip him of every claim to respect, and detract from his character all the attributes that make man estimable?"

"No, lady Worsely," replied Laura, with a firmness that seemed the result of a powerful struggle with her feelings, "I would not injure Everard, even though undue reproach were to fall on myself for his sake. I would wish to speak unreservedly to you——"

She paused irresolute, and lady Worsely, fearing the confidence offered, said—"Laura, my child, I will listen to you as a mother to her daughter; but remember to be consistent with your past self, not led by the influence of the chimera that at present disturbs you."

"No,

"No, madam," replied she, in a low voice, "I trust it is only consistency with myself that prompts me to disclose to you, the doubts that have arisen to make me suspect the change of Everard's affections. It is not the fancy of a moment—for this some time past, I have perceived—oh, why not say *felt*? —that I was no longer to him what I once was. Do not interrupt me, dear madam, to endeavour to discredit my assertion—I cannot be convinced to the contrary; and under that impression, I wish to put off the marriage, and pay an immediate visit to your sister at Bath."

"My love," said lady Worsely, "I cannot permit you to proceed in this dream of folly. Beware of allowing your fancy such influence; remember the

the importance of the affair that thus agitates you."

"Yes, it is that I remember," returned Laura. "It is the happiness of Everard I consider, and I can no longer constitute that."

At these last words her firmness forsook her, and the hard-repressed tears at last burst forth.

Lady Worsely folded her tenderly to her breast, and said, hurriedly—"I never—never will consent to this madness—you shall not, on mere supposition, throw away the peace of Everard, and, more than all, destroy your own. What infatuation has possessed you? I can scarcely believe my senses, to hear you thus talk of receding from a union cemented by all but the holy ties of the church."

"Oh,

"Oh, lady Worsely, pardon me—but I think you are deceiving me: you do it in kindness, but I feel it a mockery to the deep seriousness of my suspicions. It is not infatuation; it is real—*real!*"

Lady Worsely was overpowered with the woe that thrilled in Laura's accents; she could not immediately reply; she feared those sad suspicions were just; and silently kissed the quivering lips of the weeping girl.—"Have you," at last she said, "my dear child, any reason, besides suspicion, to accuse Everard's fidelity? Oh, Laura, do not act rashly: you may wrong him—you surely do!"

"No, no, lady Worsely; it is true—it is undoubted. Oh, can you indeed have been so wholly blind! Have you not perceived his preference of Sophia?"

"Sophia!" cried lady Worsely, with unfeigned

unfeigned resentment; "I would disown Sophia, were she capable of attempting to draw from you the affections of Everard! You mistake his manner to her; she is lively; and he, like all other young men, thinks it necessary to offer her some attentions."

"Ah, madam," replied Laura, sadly, "it is more than manner: I tried to deceive myself with that idea, until shocked at my own selfishness, I no more repelled the conviction of his estranged regard."

"I will not believe it," said lady Worsely, impatiently. "Everard has sense and judgment. And you! so superior to Sophia!"

"She is far superior to me in all things," replied Laura, in an humble, broken voice. "Oh, dear lady Worsely,

attempt

attempt no more to beguile me with an illusion, that every feeling tells me the weakness of. Bring sir George to accede to my visiting your sister, and let Everard be freed entirely from this unhappy engagement."

"What!" exclaimed lady Worsely, "do you seriously mean to dissolve the engagement with Everard! to throw away such brilliant prospects, and sacrifice your own happiness! Never, Laura, will either sir George or I permit you to commit such an action of folly! Everard is bound to you, by vows that no honourable man could break; and even if he were base enough to design such conduct, you have friends who would not suffer you to be so injuriously treated."

"Ah, lady Worsely, you speak now

as a guardian, not as a woman," said Laura, exerting herself to be firm. "I know you are my friend; but you are unjust to me, if you suppose that I would take advantage of the fettered honour of Everard. His vows were only mine while they were voluntarily given; and when I received them, it was only in the belief that they were plighted with the same affection as my own. Talk then, dear madam, no longer of his engagement to me; it exists not beyond this night—to-morrow he shall be free."

"Impossible!" said lady Worsely, much agitated; "this is a determination you cannot fulfil, without the consent of your friends: an engagement so far advanced, cannot be broken off."

"Were it at the altar, I would retreat,"

treat," said Laura, nerved with generous and womanly pride. "Lady Worsely, think of me as for yourself; do not degrade me with the supposition, that Everard's hand could be acceptable to me without his heart. While he loved me, an empire would not have bribed me from him; but now, since he has chosen another, no friends, no persuasions, could induce me to a union with him. Forgive me, dearest lady Worsely, that I thus seem to reject your authority; but all feeling of self-respect must be gone, before I could submit to be guided by the observations that you have just uttered."

"I know not how to reply," said lady Worsely, after a pause of embarrassed reflection: "I am confounded by this most unexpected change. I can scarce-

ly credit such dishonourable conduct in Everard. Certainly I should not wish you to throw away your heart on one who was not perfectly sensible of its value. Surely he is accused wrongfully! But if there be any foundation for your doubts, there shall never one of this family appear to have occasioned his inconstancy. Unless as your husband, our doors never open to him again."

"Do not, I beseech you, act upon my confidence, to the disturbance of Sophia," said Laura, with great earnestness. "Although circumstances led me to mention her name, it was not with reproach, nor intention to draw upon her your displeasure. If I blamed her, it could be only through envy. It is no fault of hers that she is so beautiful, or that Everard could not behold her unmoved.

unmoved. Once released from his engagement, I trust neither Everard nor she will find cause to consider me as any further hinderance to—to——"

Laura's feelings at this moment burst their painful restraint; she could talk of freeing Everard from herself; but to give him to another—an agony of emotion choked her words, and sobbing convulsively, she sunk back on the pillow.

Lady Worsely, alarmed at the agitated state of Laura's mind and body, purposely dropped a conversation that appeared to increase it at every word; she wished that she should now sink into her night's rest, but unwilling to leave her alone, she proposed that her maid should watch by her for a few hours. To this, however, Laura ob-

sulted with her husband how so disagreeable an affair was to be managed.

Sir George was some time before he could believe that his wife was not jesting; when he was convinced that she was in earnest, his amazement and indignation were beyond all measure.

Although Sophia was his wife's niece, yet both himself and lady Worsely were most partial to Laura. Sophia was a mere resplendent beauty, fitted only to dazzle the eye of a stranger. Laura was formed to be the charm of those she lived with—her beauty, though less brilliant than Sophia's, was of that soft loveliness, that creates a deeper interest at every succeeding gaze, until, at last, it becomes impressed on the mind as perfection; and her disposition was so perfectly attuned to all gentle amiabilities,

CHAPTER IV.

LATE as her conversation with Laura had made it, lady Worsely could not retire to rest without informing sir George of this unpleasant occurrence. Had she entertained any doubts that Laura was mistaken in her conjectures of Everard's constancy, she would have been less ready to repeat a circumstance that might have only fancy for its foundation; but although unwilling to allow Laura to suppose she coincided in her belief, she was but too much inclined to admit the supposition of Everard's changed affections, and anxiously con-

sulted with her husband how so disagreeable an affair was to be managed.

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amiabilities, that her presence was ever soothing, delightful, and agreeable.

Sir George viewed her with parental love, and esteeming her as he did, he could scarcely conceive the possibility of her lover forsaking her. He threatened to turn Sophia from his house; and declared, that if Everard displayed but the smallest desire to withdraw his addresses from Laura, he, as her guardian, would pursue him with every penalty attached to such base dereliction of principle.

Lady Worsely endeavoured to calm the anger of her husband, and conjured him to drop all thought of such violent proceeding, in compassion to Laura, who would die to have her name brought into the mouth of the public, as if her heart could have its price for being broken. She told sir George she had

mentioned the matter to him, only because she saw that Laura was determined on retreating from her approaching union with Everard; her ladyship trusted to the delay being of short duration, as she hoped this interruption would yet pass over, and Laura be once more assured that her hold of Everard's affections was too powerful to be in danger from any attractions of another.

The following morning, lady Worsely was surprised to see Laura in the breakfast-room; she looked pale and languid, but there was no other appearance of her last night's disorder; she joined in conversation as usual, and was so calm and collected in her manner, that lady Worsely was in hopes her mind had already rejected its doubts and resolves of last night; and half regretted she had

had been so hasty in her communication to sir George, who she perceived was now quite on the alert with observation, and not disposed to be at all gracious to his niece.

Sophia did look conscious; although she knew not a word that had passed between lady Worsely and Laura, yet she was convinced, from the latter's disappearance the preceding evening, that the attentions of Everard to her were not unnoticed; and she began to fear the consequences of a coquetry, which, although begun in giddy heedlessness, was like to end in serious disgrace to herself.

She was diffident to accost her injured friend, but Laura gave her not one look of reproach; she addressed her with her wonted gentleness; and though cer-

tainly not gay, yet her demeanour was neither unkind nor accusingly sad. She answered, that her headache was better, and evidently wished to avoid all reference to the past evening.

When breakfast was removed, sir George asked her if she would take a drive, and he would order his curricle?

This offer, on his part, was unusual; since Everard's return, he had not interfered with her time, but often laughingly assured her that he knew better than to come in the way of a lover. It made her suppose that lady Worsely had already spoken to sir George of her doubts of Everard's constancy; she looked involuntarily at her ladyship, and a sudden emotion rushed through her frame, at what appeared to her the first sever of the interest betwixt Everard and her.

She

She contrived, however, to command voice sufficient to thank sir George, and decline his offer, but without assigning any cause for her refusal.

Sophia, in alarm at the agitated confusion of Laura, and the disturbed air of both her uncle and aunt, hastened to quit the room. No one spoke for a few seconds, when sir George, coming round to Laura, laid his hand kindly on her shoulder, and said—"So I hear you want to run away from your lover?"

Laura at the minute was incapable of reply; her head sunk, and a deep crimson rushed painfully burning over her whole face.

"Perhaps it was but a dream of last night's indisposition?" said lady Worsely, gently.

Laura burst into tears.

"If you weep," said sir George, with indignant feeling, "others shall lament in the cause as well as you. But I hesitate to yield credence to the perfidy you wish to ascribe to Everard. Mere suspicion is too slight a foundation for such an attack on a man's honour."

Laura interrupted him; and while her sobs rose at every word, hastily said —"Do not condemn Everard; do not accuse me, sir George, of acting upon fancy alone. If he has changed, his honour will never be hurt in withdrawing his addresses to me. He is free—released from every promise to me, as if they had never been made."

"No, Laura, no," cried sir George, loudly; "you have friends who will see your heart respected, and your rights supported to the utmost. But how is this

this strange confusion accounted for? On what grounds has Everard given room for this—if it be not true—injurious surmise? Sophia is an inhabitant of this house; she is your friend, and as such, your lover may consider her as entitled to his attentions. Everard is thought amiable by all who know him; he is a desirable connexion, in every sense of the word; such a man is not to be offended, with slight suspicions, or the perhaps little jealousies of his mistress."

Sir George threw some jocularity of tone into the last part of his speech, as if he wished to do away the reproof which it might otherwise be thought to contain. Laura however felt it add deeper weight to her distress; she could only articulate—"It is for his happiness, not my own."

"His

"His happiness will never be but blended with your own," replied lady Worsely, impressively. "In deserting you, he will desert himself, and in bitterness will he soon awaken to that conviction."

Laura, by this time a little calmed, replied in answer to sir George—"Were it but jealousy, I think I could hide and be ashamed of so selfish a feeling; and if my suspicions were slight, I should gladly believe what friends would say to destroy their influence. I did try so to beguile myself, sir George; you now see the result of that attempt. I am convinced that the affections of Everard are no longer mine. You talk of respecting my heart, and supporting my rights; my heart were unworthy of respect, could it require other aid than its own power,

and

and my rights—their support was Everard's attachment alone."

Laura's voice faltered into silence; lady Worsely mutely folded her to her breast; and sir George, affected with regret and admiration, walked once or twice across the room before he renewed the conversation. He was irresolute what opinion to form—whether Laura's fancy was the sole cause of this embarrassment; or if there was any reality for her suspicions. He grieved that he swayed more to the latter belief than the former: through the years of almost her whole lifetime, Laura's disposition had been nearly constantly under his observation; it could not have escaped his notice, had she been unsteady, selfish, or prone to suspicion; he knew her to be the very reverse of such a character; and

too

"His happiness [illegible]ery kind feeling to blended with yo[illegible]ery, to pain the heart Worsely, imp[illegible]dging of her thus, he you, he will [illegible]w himself to suppose that terness wi[illegible] conduct was the result of viction." [illegible]e or fickleness on her part;

Lau[illegible]collecting also the scene of the repli[illegible]nds the evening preceding, which it h[illegible] even then, unsuspecting as he was, bo[illegible]ck him as extraordinary, he dread- [illegible]d that there was but too much cause for Laura's distressing doubts. "I cannot behold this unhappy perplexity," said he, "without endeavouring to have it explained. Mr. Everard will be here presently, and this uncertainty shall be cleared away."

"It will immediately," said Laura, with trembling earnestness; "forgive me," and she cast a look of mournful entreaty

entreaty at sir George and lady Worsely —" forgive me what I have done without your knowledge! I have written to Everard this morning, and though you accuse his honour, I know it will never be guilty of insincerity."

" My dear Laura, what have you done?" cried lady Worsely; " you have been too precipitate." She could not restrain her tears, and sir George, equally shocked, expressed his regret also.

" But I was right," said Laura, with sad firmness; " I knew your opinion would differ from mine, on the strength of the engagement betwixt Everard and me."

" But, my dear Laura," said sir George, " I was the person to seek an explanation from Everard, if any such

was required; there was much to be said by a friend on the subject."

"It was that I feared," replied Laura; "I was aware what your friendship would have dictated, and I shuddered to think that Everard's heart should require expostulation, to fulfil its engagement with me. Permit me now to retire. I beg no notice may be taken of me, but I would rather not appear to any visitors to-day."

"Whatever can conduce to your comfort, Laura," said sir George, as he opened the door for her, and regarded her with a look, where pity, esteem, and admiration, were all blended.

Sir George and his lady had a long conversation together, after Laura had departed, she the sole subject; but both decided to take no farther steps in the affair,

affair, until Everard's answer should arrive. Neither could believe that an engagement so near its completion was to be thus suddenly broken off, or that the infatuation of Everard could have attained such a height, as to make him wish those vows dissolved, which bound to him beauty, virtue, and devoted attachment.

Lady Worsely forbore to follow Laura; she wished to know what she had written to Everard—but as the subject was so delicate, and deep in Laura's heart, she thought it might be a confidence that she felt it impossible to bestow on a third person.

CHAP-

CHAPTER V.

In this supposition, her ladyship, however, was mistaken; Laura was too grateful, and attached to her guardians, to desire a concealment from them; and in about two hours afterwards, she sent to request the presence of lady Worsely in her room.

She delayed not an instant in repairing thither. Laura was standing as she entered—there was no trace of tears in her eyes; they seemed to burn in dry fixedness—her face was one unvaryed hue of ashy whiteness; but it was still and unmoved in its expression.

It

It was a calm, however, that appalled lady Worsely; she advanced anxiously; Laura met her, and silently put a letter into her hand. It was addressed to Everard, and her ladyship read as follows: —"When we parted two years ago, Everard, I believed you were sincere in your professions of attachment, for your manner attested them as much as your words, and I received your vows, because I supposed, in offering them to me, it promised as much to your happiness as it did to mine.

"Why I should no longer trust to that belief, it is useless to relate; your heart will explain the cause, and acquit me of unjust suspicion.

"It is needless further to deceive yourself or me, with attentions that you evidently desire to bestow on another.

Your

Your vows which you may fear, ceased to be binding the instant your preference underwent a change; nor can your honour be injured, but in attempting to carry on an engagement to which your manner declares your heart to be utterly repugnant.

"I call upon you, Everard, to avow your estranged affections; without falsehood, you cannot deny that they are so; and to that degradation your candid mind will never allow you to submit, nor insult, with vain subterfuge, her who esteems you."

"Oh, Laura, he never could resign you!" cried lady Worsely, as she finished, and looked up.

Laura's pale fixed countenance met her gaze, and in unbroken silence she presented another letter. Lady Worsely perceived

perceived the writing to be Everard's; she trembled as she unclosed it.

"Dearest Laura, how am I to reply to the letter I have just received from you? Can I acknowledge myself so worthless as to have deserved it? or avow a change of sentiments which must separate me from you, to whom I have sworn myself by every profession that is binding to a man of honour?

"I beseech you forget your suspicions; my life is ready to be devoted to your happiness; and each feeling is full of veneration for your character. Have compassion on me, and forget that you doubted—I am distracted that difficulties should have arisen in a path once so full of such fair prospects. I deny falsehood, but does that contempt demand a confession of all the passing inconsistencies

tencies that may mark the frail and wayward thoughts of man? Insult you! Good God, Laura, could you pen such a sentence to me? I would rather shed my heart's blood for you! Let this unhappy correspondence be buried in total oblivion. Our engagement must not be dissolved—I am yours by every thing sacred to truth, and only wait for your time to become your husband."

"Does not this satisfy you?" asked lady Worsely, inwardly not sure that it should do so.

"I replied to that letter," said Laura.

"Indeed!" rejoined lady Worsely, with great anxiety. "Was not the subject concluded here?"

A slight convulsion passed over Laura's face, but she, in low deliberate accents,

accents, replied—" I said to him—' You are free."

" Was that all ?"

" All !"

" Oh, Laura !" exclaimed her ladyship, " you have destroyed your own peace, by this rash proceeding. Everard's best affections are still your own. If a transient fancy should have led him to admire another, you see with what condemnation he regards himself. You have been too severe on a wandering thought, that interfered not with his truth and esteem for you. You ought to have considered, long before you made a renunciation so fatal to yourself and Everard."

" I did consider it," replied Laura, " long before I confided my suspicions to you. His letter confirms the chang-

ed state of his affections—he is ready to fulfil his engagement, but now only from a mistaken sense of honour. Take those letters to sir George; their contents will be sacred to him as to you; say to him, the engagement betwixt Mr. Everard and me is completely at an end; and the best friendship that can now be shown me, is to let the matter sink into an eternal silence. I acknowledge my heart is nearly broken; and those who wish to break it outright, will resent the matter to Everard, and bring me in to be the talk and wonder of the public."

Laura's voice gained strength at every word, and as she concluded, there was a calm determinateness in her manner, that astonished lady Worsely, who knew the anguish she felt at resigning Everard.—

ard.—"But, Laura," said she, "it cannot end thus. Everard will never——"

"Oh, do not talk of him!" interrupted Laura, with startling quickness; "I implore you, lady Worsely, to drop all reference to what he has been to me. I cannot—I cannot bear it! Let this be the last allusion to it. Everard is no longer engaged to me—from this moment our destinies are severed as if we had never met. I respect you and sir George, and would show deference to several who may think they have a right to advise me; but there does not breathe that voice that could persuade me to recall, or even wish to recall, my renunciation of Everard, or accept a hand that was not given with a willing and a faithful heart. Forgive me," cried she, melting into tears, and flinging her-

self on lady Worsely's bosom—"Oh! pity me—and be silent."

"My love, if my pity could be of avail, my tears would flow incessantly for you. My dearest, noblest child, what can friendship do to restore you to happiness?'

"Be silent! oh, be silent!" returned Laura; "dear lady Worsely, you are as a mother to me in all kind things. Permit me to go immediately—to-morrow, to your sister's; prevail on sir George to consent; he is kind too, and will forgive my hurried conduct."

"But why, my child, leave us? Be assured that unless for you, Everard shall never enter these doors again; nor shall one of this family ever add more to your concern."

"Oh, lady Worsely, I am not so selfish;

fish; but I feel I should be the better of absence—be more ready to recover my composure, amongst those who knew not that it had been disturbed."

"You shall go, my love, wherever you think you can be happiest; but not so immediately."

"Oh yes, to-morrow," cried Laura, hastily: "I must go—I cannot remain here. I have been thinking of the journey; a few hours will suffice to prepare for it; and perhaps you will spare me your maid, until I reach your sister's."

"My love, sir George will see you there. But do not be in this hurry; I can scarcely believe my senses in this confusion."

Sir George read the letters, and understood this total break betwixt Laura and Everard, with mingled sensations

of sorrow for her, and unbounded indignation against him. It was evident from Everard's letter, that he could not deny the accusation of estranged, or at least interrupted affection, with which he was taxed; but, judging from the tenour of his expressions, sir George did not believe that Everard's mind could endure a release, which was gained at the expence of honour and fidelity.

Nor was it so. Everard wrote again to Laura, refusing the freedom she restored to him, and passionately imploring her to reinstate him in her favour.

Laura read it with tears, but firmness to her first resolve; it was impossible not to perceive that it was the despair of remorse, not love, that breathed throughout this last epistle of Everard. She did love him most fondly; but there was a dignity

a dignity in her principles, that could not stoop to sacrifice the delicacy and truth of her attachment to the cold indifference of addresses, now urged by contrition and upbraiding honour. She gave it to lady Worsely, and desired her to return it as to a stranger. A laconic note conveyed it back to Everard, who, when he opened the envelope, and beheld his own letter, almost sunk insensible under the perturbation of his feelings. He was conscious of his perfidy, and in that conviction he was prevented from uttering one reproach at the conduct of Laura. The weight of his upbraiding fell on his own head, and by nature candid, honourable, and sincere, the ruin, the disgrace of all those noble sentiments, struck him with a horror, that the generosity

of his mind rendered the more acute and intolerable.

Unable to arrange his thoughts, or to overcome the disorder of his feelings, Everard ventured not to present himself that day at sir George Worsely's. He buried himself in his lodgings, and as the solitary evening wore past, he bitterly compared it with the social mansion of sir George, where, since his last arrival in town, he had been a regular and daily guest.

His reason displayed, in torturing colours, the consequences of his aberration from his faith to Laura; but along with these accusing reflections came the recollection of the beauteous cause of his infidelity, and as her image rose to his mind in all the fatal irresistibility of her charms,

charms, he found that the infatuation was beyond his power to control, or erase from his enamoured senses.

CHAPTER VI.

He passed a sleepless and wretched night; he could not longer absent himself from Laura; he alike shuddered at the completion or dissolvement of their engagement; and harassed by these opposite yet equally perplexing sentiments, he hurried to sir George Worsely's, after a scarcely-tasted breakfast, without deciding, or even knowing what were to be his motions when there.

As he approached the house, he perceived a travelling carriage drawn up to it; and he was still some yards distant, when he beheld sir George, with Laura hanging

hanging on his arm, appear on the hall-door steps. They were both equipped as for a journey. Everard staggered at the sight; then recovering himself, he rushed to the spot; but Laura, on seeing him, had sprung into the carriage, and sir George, with less elasticity, was ascending after her.

Everard ran round to the opposite side of the carriage; he pulled open the door, and, in breathless accents, exclaimed—"Laura! my God! what means this departure?"

Laura, unprepared for this interview, was unable to combat the emotion that assailed her; she shrunk back, and covered her face in silence.

Sir George, by this time seated, looked sternly at Everard, and abruptly said

 —"Your

—"Your presence is undesired, Mr. Everard."

"Sir George," cried he, unmindful of his altered manner, "there is a mistake! This departure distracts me. For God's sake, Laura, do not carry your resentment so far. Hear me, before you abandon me to dishonour." His voice and manner did indeed betoken distraction.

Laura could not persevere in her intended silence. She half raised her head, and deluged in tears, falteringly said—"Resentment has not led me, Everard: reason and conviction have separated us."

"Never separated us!" cried he, vehemently; "you may despise my vows, but I will hold you to yours."

This unjust accusation, and threatened intention, so contrary to the feelings that

that she knew now swayed the wishes of Everard, however the agitation of the moment might excite him to desire the completion of his promise to her, aroused in her bosom something of that indignation which Everard imputed to her conduct. She could not refrain from weeping, but as firmly as she could, she said—"You blame me only with your lips; your thoughts do me more justice. Yesterday dissolved our engagement; to-day we are strangers, and you have no right to address me in this language. Sir George, let us drive on. Mr. Everard uselessly detains us."

Everard's blood grew cold in every vein at this speech of Laura's. He gazed at her in astonished anguish—he sought a reply, but conscience tied his tongue. Sir George gave his orders to the

the coachman—the carriage drove on, and Everard, in motionless horror, gazed after it, as if it carried from him all the valuable part of his life. When he recollected himself, and looked round, he perceived that sir George Worsely's door was still open: the servant stood at it, evidently waiting for him, as a person that the whole household knew was at home there. A deep crimson rushed to the face of Everard: he dropped his head in shame, and turned, humbled and miserable, from those once-hospitable doors.

When he returned to his lodgings, he was presented with a letter, which had arrived in his absence; it was from sir George Worsely, dated that morning, and these were its contents:—

"SIR,

" SIR,

" I was informed by Miss Dillon yesterday evening, that the engagement which had subsisted between you and her for the last two years, was permanently dissolved that morning; and the notice which I take of it to you, is to intimate, in decided terms, that your acquaintance at my house, and with my family, ceases from this very hour. You will readily believe that this forbearance on my part proceeds from my respect to the wishes of Miss Dillon alone, otherwise it would give me satisfaction to proclaim you to the world as the dishonourable character which I now consider you to be.

" GEORGE WORSELY."

Everard

Everard tore the letter to atoms, happy if in its destruction he could as easily have blotted from his memory the circumstances which had exposed him to such a disgraceful epithet as sir George applied to him. His unfortunate passion for Sophia had destroyed his anxiety to be Laura's husband; yet in his most perturbed moments of wayward fancy for another, he had never allowed himself one thought to intend a retreat from his engagement to her. The discovery of his treachery, and the unexpected termination of an atachment so long continued, was like a thunderbolt to his reason: he wished to believe it a dream, and that he should awake from it, still the betrothed of Laura, full of happiness, and possessed of unstained honour and fidelity.

That

That hope was the dream, fading at every moment of increased reflection; and at last vanishing in the reality, showed him to himself, stripped of worldly honour, of self-respect, of truth, and every feeling that makes the breast of man at peace with memory. He passed the day in a fever of perturbation; he knew not on what to resolve; he thought to fly after Laura; but her coldness, her contempt, her knowledge of a perfidy he had not been able to conceal, and now durst not deny, debarred him from that pursuit, and left him a prey to the most distracting uncertainty and self-accusation.

As the dusk of the evening fell, he issued from his lodgings; and impelled by an uncontrollable impulse, directed his steps to the street in which lived sir George

George Worsely. It was too dark for him to be recognised, yet with the diffidence of a criminal, he stole along the pavement, and by stealthy looks, gazed on the once-welcoming doors, now shut against him for ever.

The lower shutters only of the drawing-room were closed; light gleamed from above them; and as he fixed his eyes on the windows, he remembered the social circle of that room, the mild gaiety of lady Worsely, the honest kindness of sir George, the loveliness and modest tenderness of Laura, and brightly in the recollection came the dazzling witcheries of Sophia. Yet, with all her splendid and entrancing beauty, Sophia but shared at that moment his thoughts with Laura: forsaken and lost to him, she returned to his memory,

memory, in all the soft charms that had first taught his heart the rapture of loving and being loved. She was lovely to his eye, but to his mind also she had extended her captivation. In hers he had discovered all womanly gentleness, and those sweet qualities which enchant reason as well as love. His passion for Sophia was too burning to ask counsel of reason; her beauty inflamed his senses, and led him, by its fascination alone, to err against the opposing voice of his judgment and conscience.

Unfitted by the agitated state of his mind to enter immediately into society, Everard, for several days after Laura's departure, was the melancholy and constant inmate of his lodgings; he denied himself to all inquiries, until some of his friends forced themselves on his privacy,

vacy, and dragged him again into company.

It was soon talked that an interruption had occurred to derange the intended marriage of Everard; but owing to the silence of Laura and her guardians, the causes of that hinderance were never rightly understood, but rather imputed to her, in consequence of the distress which it was known he had suffered at the time of the rupture, and her immediate departure from town.

Meanwhile Sophia's situation was very dismal too, in her own imagination. As soon as lady Worsely had recovered from the agitation of bidding Laura adieu, she sent for her niece, and told her that she was instantly to prepare for going down into the country, where she

was

was to remain with her two maiden cousins during the winter.

Sophia shrieked at this intimation, and falling on her knees, implored her aunt not to banish her from the house, as if a guilty person—mentioned for the first time her suspicions of a breach betwixt Everard and Laura—declared her total innocence of any attempt to attract Everard—and with an agony of entreaty, conjured her aunt not to send her to her cousins, who would think the displeasure of lady Worsely her disgrace.

Lady Worsely, not expecting to find so much sensibility in Sophia, was a little moved with her agitated address; and her niece perceiving a ray in her favour, urged her petition with such anxious supplication, that lady Worsely relented in her severe design; but in granting

granting Sophia to remain with her, assured her that she should spend the winter retired from all gaiety, as a just punishment for the distress she had been the means of inflicting upon Laura. She also interdicted her from all further acquaintance with Everard, declaring solemnly, if she disobeyed in that, she should on the instant set out for her cousins.

Sophia, too happy to escape these cross and dreaded relatives, promised all the obedience that her aunt required; and also listened, in submissive silence, to a long and severe lecture on coquetry.

Sophia's coquetry was not however to be solely blamed in this unhappy affair. It certainly might have assisted the wandering of Everard; but his fancy was struck by her beauty, before Sophia had

had gained time to think of attracting his notice; nor had she, even in that desire, one idea of interfering with his engagement to Laura; it proceeded merely from her love of admiration, and her giddy flirtation of manner.

For some weeks after this period, Sophia's obedience was not put to any test in avoiding Everard; she learned, from one of their common acquaintances, that he had gone down to his estate; and she for whom he had sacrificed so much, all but forgot him, until her thoughts were driven to him, by the long, tiresome evenings which she was now obliged to spend at home.

At first, the remembrance of her aunt's resentment, and the dread of an abode with her old cousins, prevented Sophia from indulging in any reflections of Everard;

Everard; but as her alarm subsided, and she perceived the dulness which was likely to surround her for the winter, the still unreconciled manner of her aunt, and the cold, and sometimes rough, behaviour of sir George to her, her ideas insensibly reverted to Everard, and the happy, uncontrolled being she should be, if allowed to avail herself of his regard.

Devoid of all the warmer emotions of the heart, and vain to excess, she was greatly flattered by the preference she had gained over Laura; and instead of feeling regret for her influence, she secretly exulted in it, as a proof of her superior charms.

Since the engagement was broken off betwixt Laura and Everard, she was inclined to consider it as an unjust hard-

ship

ship to herself, that she should be prevented from forming a brilliant establishment, merely because it might mortify Laura, to see another in possession of what she had rejected; for Sophia, in her self-exculpation, would not allow Laura any merit in releasing Everard from his promise, but wished to condemn her, as capricious and unjust. Indulging thus her selfishness, she often reflected with pleasure on the admiration she had excited in Everard; she knew it was powerful, and then she recollected that he was rich, and in the gay circle that she delighted to frequent. Were she his wife, what boundless prospects of enjoyment would be opened to her! Her life would be a round of pleasure—wealth, carriages, diamonds, and perfect liberty; for Everard, in his ado-

ration, would be incapable of restraining her in one single desire. Sophia sighed lamentingly at the difference of those ideas to her present lot. Immured with lady Worsely—to obey for ever—to sit moping the long evening, at work or music, or slumber over a book—where, in company only with tiresome people, who drew their conversation solely from their intellectual acquirements, and neither flirted, coquetted, nor talked nonsense, Sophia really thought she was buried alive, and would have been sullen to her uncle and aunt, if she had dared.

The company at sir George Worsely's was such as it had always been, composed of sensible and agreeable people, past the age of youthful gaiety, nor desirous to partake of it. Dinners was their

their entertainment; lady Worsely was too delicate in health for evening parties; when her young friends attended them, it was always with some other and selected matron.

It was these last parties that Sophia loved and regretted; she could not amuse herself—her mind became a dead vacuum, when left to its own resources; all her ideas were centered in balls, and dress, and admiration. But although lady Worsely had interdicted Sophia from the continual round of gaiety which she was so much inclined to run, there were some houses that she could not nor would not deprive her of permission to visit at. Several relations of the Worselys wintered in town; and at their mansions, where there were younger branches belonging to the family, So-

phia, with delighted avidity, flew to the giddy throng of the midnight ball.

At one of these she unexpectedly encountered Everard—a mutual consciousness gave an interest to the meeting. Sophia blushed with pleasure, and forgot her aunt's commands, as she replied to his address. The still unsubdued passion of Everard blazed up at her sight to its former tumultuous transport.

Every reflection, but of herself, sunk beneath its violence—he followed her—he hung upon her steps, with a devotion that left not Sophia a doubt of his entire captivation to her charms.

He did not venture a question that could refer to the past; but when he spoke of seeing her again, Sophia was obliged to inform him that she had disobeyed

obeyed her aunt, in renewing, that night, her acquaintance with him.

Everard reddened, but made no remark on lady Worsely's injunction; it silenced him for an instant; then bursting forth again into entreaty, he implored Sophia still to let him see her.

Sophia's party were just making their exit—she was hurried, and had not time to deny to him that she was to call at her music-seller's the following day.

For a few weeks from that evening, Sophia discovered a partiality for her piano she had never done before—she was constantly talking of new music, and in search of it at the shop they dealt with; when much about the time that the newspapers should have announced the nuptials of Everard and Laura, it contained instead, an account

of his elopement with Sophia Harwood.

At this period, Mrs. Commeline, the wife of the relation with whom Laura resided during the commencement of her acquaintance and engagement with Everard, was recommended, for a pulmonary complaint, to try the warmer winter of the South of France. She was preparing to obey the advice of her physicians, when the tidings of this elopement reached her knowledge; she was previously acquainted with the termination of their attachment, and judging that it might be agreeable to Laura to be absent for a time from places where she was likely to hear of, or see those persons who had interfered so deeply with her fair prospects and present happiness, she wrote to her, affectionately pressing her to join their party

to

to the Continent. The invitation was gladly received by Laura, who wrote immediately for the consent of sir George and lady Worsely. They were happy to assent to whatever might conduce to restore serenity to one so beloved, fondly hoping that absence, the variety of foreign scenes, and this flagrant proof of Everard's perfidy, would eventually banish from her affections all remains of regard for a man who had shewn himself so totally unworthy of her partiality.

If she remembered him still, it was in the secrecy of memory, candidly as she had avowed to her guardians the state of her feelings during the short time of the breaking of her engagement with Everard; when it was finally accomplished, neither remark, nor reference, nor surmise, had ever escaped

her lips, or pen, to shew that even his name was in her recollection. During her journey to Bath with sir George, and in the height of her agony at her last interview with Everard, she had told him that she could not speak more on the subject—they were separated, and henceforth strangers.

Sir George instantly dropped all further comment on the matter; and in Laura's letters, no word that could apply to Everard was ever to be found. The correspondence of lady Worsely was equally guarded against the once-dear theme; and it was from the newspapers that Laura received the intelligence of Everard's elopement with Sophia.

She thought she had convinced herself that their union was to be; but when it did really come, she found it

did

did not crush the less heavy, for the hopeless resignation with which she had dwelt on the idea. She hastened to leave a land where so lately she had anticipated to be a happy and beloved bride; and as the vessel that bore her away receded from the coast, she turned from the lessening view, unwilling even that the gales which flew over her on their way to the shore, should bear with them her farewell sighs for the husband of another.

CHAPTER VII.

On the return of Everard and Sophia from their matrimonial expedition, they endeavoured, through the medium of friends, to gain a reconciliation with sir George and lady Worsely. In that expectation they were, however, entirely disappointed; their most submissive advances were rejected, and their intercessors, and their letters, met with one unvaried answer—that sir George and lady Worsely declined all future acquaintance or knowledge of Mr. and Mrs. Everard.

Sophia, careless, and apprehensive of the

the censure of her uncle and aunt, gave not much consideration to their displeasure; and Everard, entranced with his bride, was as yet too little master of any reflection, beyond sensations of the lover's rapture, to allow a circumstance independent of that to cause him annoyance.

Immediately on their arrival in town, Everard hired a house for the winter; and Sophia found herself placed at the head of that brilliant establishment she had panted for, complete mistress of her time, her wealth, and the will of her husband. She had but to desire, and the idolatrous Everard grudged the moments that intervened, until he could procure her the utmost extent of her wish.

Her rage for gaiety and dress, no longer under the prudent control of her

aunt, but entirely under her own heedless guidance, launched forth into an extravagance that procured her a notoriety for fashion, far more desirable to Sophia than any happiness that was to be found in the domestic sphere of home. Domestic, however, was a word that she knew not the use of; and as Everard's delirium of passion, sobered by its own violence, began to lose its blinding influence, he could look at the beauty of Sophia, and even in the gaze, ask what else was to be loved.

Young as Everard was, his pursuits were more directed to the enjoyments of home, than the search of amusement abroad: he was fond of literature, and all the elegant accomplishments of rational life. Sophia hated the sight of a book—music she had not time to practise;

tise; nor did she care for it, except at the theatre or in a ball-room—conversation struck her dumb, that did not consist of dress, nonsense, and folly; and the few minutes—seldom hours—that Everard and she were alone together through the day, she whiled away the time, not with gentle tenderness and pleasing discourse, but in giddily teazing him—pouting at him, that she might laugh at his anxiety to restore her good humour—pulling the marks out of his books—turning them into silly ridicule, and flinging them from his reach, with all the caprice of a spoiled child, that knows, but cannot respect its indulgence.

For a while these pretty follies reached not the mind of Everard through the delusion of his senses; and this honey-

moon

moon play was charming to him, in the unreflective transports of the bride-groom; but as reason, which, though conquered for a time, never fails to resume its sway in a sensible bosom, began to reclaim its ascendancy, the veil that had hitherto deluded his senses, seemed to promise to be fearfully withdrawn. He had now to court back the deception that he already half dreaded had beguiled him, and labour to retain the impressions that had once so powerfully, of their own accord, possessed him. He would not think that he had been the slave to beauty alone—that he had yielded his judgment, his heart, his honour, his truth, to the mere dazzle of a brilliant face, that hid a breast as dull and unfeeling as that of a splendidly-coloured doll. He would not allow himself

himself thus to reflect; he hurried with horror from the intruding idea, and vainly strove to sustain the illusion still, of that fancied perfection which had once so suddenly and so fatally enchanted him into madness.

This inward anxiety assailed Everard, before even the few remaining months of winter were over; but pleased, or gloomy, or sad, he procured not Sophia's attention. She pursued a ceaseless career of gaiety and folly, that her husband sought in vain to prevail against: in the days of his bridegroom delirium, he had resigned all power into her hands, and now found that his gentlest remonstrances were considered as an offence, and his persuasions derided as ridiculous. His fortune was handsome, and Sophia, richly dowered herself, thought she had nothing on earth

earth to do but play with time and money as she chose. In town or country, her rage for amusement was the same; her pursuits, her ideas, her disposition, were all in total dissimilitude from those of her husband; nor could he even sooth this painful discovery, with the belief that he still held an interest in her heart; he even doubted now that he ever had, too rightly conjecturing that his admiration had been acceptable only as it gratified a vain unfeeling coquette, and his addresses desirable but as conducive to exempting her from the judicious control of her aunt, and placing her mistress of an establishment, which would allow her to indulge in her indiscriminate propensity for gaiety and lavish extravagance.

This conviction, to a mind formed

to

to desire and appreciate the delights of connubial love, and the blessings of domestic enjoyments, was a blight upon the hopes of Everard, that began to press with saddening influence upon his life. He remembered that *once* he had possessed the love of a sensible and feeling heart; but in that remembrance all was distraction; nor had he a painful thought nor heavy hour, that he did not in anguish acknowledge was just and deserved retribution.

Two years rolled over the head of this ill-suited pair, in the same round as they had begun, of ruinous and irrational gaiety to the wife, and little short of that period in disappointment and regret to the husband. His frenzy, excited by beauty, was now subsided; his mind was too cultivated, and his intel-

lects

lects too powerful in talent and reason, to allow him long to be the slave of passion alone; but that resumption of judgment was too late awakened to do him service; he recovered it to find that he was self-betrayed from happiness—that his infatuating dream had lost its delusion—and that in its stead had arisen astonishment, self-accusation, and indifference, that bore a fearful tendency to contempt.

They were still unreconciled to sir George and lady Worsely; Sophia appeared to have forgotten them, nor to recollect that they had protected her, with fostering care, for the better half of her as yet short life. If she did happen to mention them, it was ever to blame them for the cessation of intercourse; for Sophia was of that sensible and conciliating

ating disposition, which never admits even the possibility of its being in the wrong, and wonders at and despises all thoughts, opinions, and sentiments, which differ but in one tittle from the fancies of itself.

Everard's personal acquaintance with the Worselys had commenced only from the date of his return from the Continent, to fulfil his then existing engagement with Laura Dillon; but short as was that period, it came more fondly to his recollection than years of intimacy with others.

Owing to the situation he then stood in with Laura, he was received by sir George and his lady, from his first appearance at their house, more like a son than a stranger; they were persons possessing every kind and pleasing attribute

bute of social life; to them Everard was first welcome as the lover of Laura, and shortly also for the truly estimable qualities that adorned his disposition. The impression was equally favourable on the mind of Everard; and when the fatal break in their acquaintance took place, he found that he had insensibly acquired an esteem for sir George and lady Worsely, and a partiality for their society, that no coldness or estrangement on their part could dispossess from his memory.

The severity of their displeasure never ceased to occasion him both pain and regret, and if it had not been for his utter consciousness of the just cause they had for their resentment, and his fear of being repulsed, with merited contempt, he would have endeavoured personally

personally to solicit a reconciliation, not without a hope, that while it gratified his own earnest wishes, it might also be the means of withdrawing, in some degree, Sophia from her destructive career of folly, if she could be once more brought under any influence of the wise, and prudent, and amiable lady Worsely.

While he had come to such anxiety for a renewal of their acquaintance, as to hesitate whether to venture a scorn, the more cruel because the more just, Sophia, in consequence of her perpetual and obstinate racketting, was seized with a sudden and violent illness. The indisposition of one so foremost in the fashionable circles, could not fail to be noticed in the newspapers of the courtly calendar; and so long were their regrets

expressed

expressed for the continued malady of the beautiful Mrs. Everard, that lady Worsely began to feel alarmed for her niece, and hastened to seek intelligence of her from their common friends. She found, from them, that the statements of the newspapers had not been exaggerated, and that Sophia was still languishing under a severe disease, that confined her entirely to bed.

Disturbed by these accounts, lady Worsely was irresolute whether to adhere to their hitherto estrangement; she consulted with sir George, as, in the event of her repairing to the sick-bed of her niece, it must, of course, renew the acquaintance between the two families.

Although distant, and removed from all intercourse, neither sir George nor his lady had been indifferent to the concerns

cerns of the young pair, and lamented deeply the giddy life which, on all sides, they heard Sophia was pursuing. Of Everard also they heard sufficient to inform them, that, if it was not known he repented his marriage, it was visible enough, that at least he did not participate in the gay inclinations of his wife; and sir George and lady Worsely, acquainted with his rational ideas of amusement, and his cultivated and superior mind, could well imagine that he would find sad havock in his expectations, when the infatuation which had led him astray should lose its deceptive fascination.

Softened by these deprecating circumstances, the humanity of this truly worthy couple overcame their resentment; and the morning succeeding to their deliberation

liberation on the subject, lady Worsely, at an early hour, ordered her carriage, and drove to Berkely-square, where her niece resided. The street before the house covered with straw, and the muffled knocker, struck her with a sensation of dismay. Her footman ran down the area steps to procure her admittance; and as the hall door was slowly opened, she alighted and entered.

She had scarcely uttered an inquiry after her niece, when the parlour door opened, and Everard himself issued forth. The unexpected appearance of lady Worsely struck him motionless; he looked as if his eyes deceived him in what he beheld. Her ladyship advanced, and in softened accents said—"Mr. Everard, it is long since we have met; but

but friendly motives bring me hither. I come to inquire about my poor niece."

Everard could just articulate—" Ah, lady Worsely !" He pressed her hand in speechless fervour, changed alternately from red to pale, and lowered his eyes, in a humility of expression that deeply moved the feelings of his visitor in his behalf. He made a strong effort to recover himself, and in the next instant said —" Yes, Sophia is very ill. Ah, lady Worsely, did you indeed remember us?"

A throb of uncontrollable emotion faltered through these last words, and again he wrung her hand, without daring to raise his eyes.

Lady Worsely could understand the mingled sensations of the present and the past, that so powerfully assailed Everard at this first interview with her,

since his perfidy and its consequences. She felt agitated herself, with the many reflections that painfully hurried to her own recollection; and as she asked if she could see her niece, her voice shook and her eyes swam in tears.

Everard led her into the parlour he had just quitted, and said he would go and see that Sophia was prepared to receive her, as she was exceedingly low, and incapable of sustaining the least flurry on her nerves.

CHAPTER VIII.

He was not long absent, and when he returned, seemed much gratified to tell that Sophia was anxious to see her aunt. He conducted her up stairs, and left her at the door of his wife's chamber, unwilling to interrupt, by the presence of a third person, an interview which he so earnestly hoped would renew all the former affection and influence between the aunt and the niece.

The room was partially darkened, but still sufficiently lighted to show distinctly its fair, pale inhabitant, stretched, in feeble and emaciated languor, on her

bed: her heavy eyes were directed to the door, but they drooped, with faded consciousness, as her aunt approached; and she diffidently raised her hand, which seemed almost too weak to support its own thin and delicate weight.

Lady Worsely tenderly clasped the silent peace-offering that was extended to her; and kissing her niece with the fondness of a parent, she soothingly said —" My poor Sophia, I did not look for such a meeting as this."

Sophia became excessively agitated, and, scarcely heard, endeavoured to say —" Dear aunt, you are good to come— to forgive me;" and the last sentence was uttered with fluttering fear.

" Yes, we will forget all that is past," replied lady Worsely. " I came to do you all kind service in my power."

For

For the succeeding week lady Worsely was constant in her daily attendance in Berkely-square; she beheld with pleasure the gradually returning health of Sophia, and trusted that the seclusion of a sick room would cause her to reflect on the giddy and wasting pursuits which had occasioned her invalid state.

As she was recovering, and the first embarrassment of reconcilement worn off, Sophia ventured to inquire of her aunt concerning Laura.

Lady Worsely, without appearing to remember any thing that was past, informed her that Laura was still on the Continent with Mrs. Commeline, who had found such benefit from the change of climate, that she had determined to remain some years abroad, in the hopes

of completely re-establishing her health before her return to England.

"I have understood that Laura was still in France," replied Sophia; then hesitatingly added, "but she has been so long absent, that I thought she might have some intention now of returning."

"Not until with Mrs. Commeline," answered lady Worsely; "and that I believe will not be for another year."

"Will she continue with the Commelines then?" demanded Sophia.

"I trust not," replied lady Worsely, with some quickness; "we are her proper guardians, and while she remains in this country, and unprovided with a home of her own, I hope her residence will ever be with sir George and me."

"She would find a home of her own so delightful," said Sophia, unthinkingly.

"I trust

"I trust she will do so, when a suitable one offers," rejoined her ladyship; "she has a mind and disposition that indeed promises to make home delightful."

There was a point in her words that Sophia applied to herself; she coloured, and made no further observation on the subject.

During the first days of her attendance on her niece, while she yet continued severely indisposed, lady Worsely, snatching an early breakfast at home, had devoted the remainder of the day to her office of nurse, and, in consequence, always dined in Berkely-square.

The hours that set him down with lady Worsely, were a new feeling of comfort to Everard; he had almost forgotten the social pleasure of a family

dinner; and partaking it with lady Worsely, cheered by her benign manners, and enlivened by her intelligent conversation, it came upon his mind like a gleam of those hopes, which had once filled his anticipations of the contentments of home. *He* never uttered the name of Laura; and lady Worsely had mingled now so much of pity with her resentment, that she studiously avoided any topic that she knew would give him pain, or seem to point to a reference to the past. She could not be blind to the look of blank happiness which Everard's countenance expressed: a complaint of Sophia had never passed his lips, except what she could infer from his solicitude, that she should prevail on his wife to expose her health less to the sure injuries of the constant round of company which

which she had followed: but lady Worsely required no words to inform her that their habits and pursuits could never render their married state happy, particularly on his side, who had sense, talents, and rationality, to feel that difference in its most acute dissimilitude.

When a week of attendance on Sophia had expired, and lady Worsely thought a few hours in the morning sufficient now to bestow on the invalid, the spirits of Everard fell to even more than their former depression, when he understood that her ladyship was no longer to dine in Berkely-square; he could not restrain expressions of disappointment at the privation of this short-lived delight, nor smother a sigh, as he thanked her for the pleasure she had conferred, on hours that would have

otherwise passed solitary and dull. The sigh spoke forcibly for the apprehended sadness of his future hours. He stood in the hall at parting with lady Worsely; the afternoon was considerably fallen—within doors it was already dusk.

Lady Worsely was now nearly softened into all her former favour for Everard. She perceived the agitation that was over him: then, as she looked round the darkened hall, and into the at present gloomy-looking dining-room, and thought that she was to leave him there, lonely and dispirited, while she was to return to a social and happy home, her heart relented to him altogether, and passing her arm through his, she said, in all the wonted cordiality of other days—"You must go home with me, Mr. Everard; I really cannot leave you

to

to a solitary dinner, while sir George and I will feel so much the better of your company."

She felt a sudden thrill start through the arm she held. Everard was a moment in replying: then, in a deeply-suppressed voice, said—"Lady Worsely, I know not how to thank you—you seem to feel for me, that all a man's worth is not totally ruined in one—in one deviation from honour."

Lady Worsely could but faintly catch his concluding words. She felt a momentary embarrassment, but energetically replied—"If our acquaintance is to be renewed again, Mr. Everard, all reference to what is past must be for ever dropped between us."

"Good God, lady Worsely! talk not of the renewal of our acquaintance de-

pending on me. I would die to recover but one portion of your forfeited esteem. I am so unworthy—can you then take compassion? Will sir George—ah, lady Worsely, will he allow me in his presence?"

"Sir George can forgive as I can," answered she. "If you desire a reconcilement, Mr. Everard, do not insist upon knowing whether we can forget also. Sir George will welcome you; my guests meet ever the reception of his own. Now let us go, and see what he has been about all this long day."

Everard followed lady Worsely into her carriage; but though he knew of old the unfailing cordiality that subsisted between her and sir George, yet he dreaded that in his case she had ventured beyond its bounds; and that her present

sent guest would fail, if never one failed before, to receive a welcoming reception. He remembered the censure he had incurred from sir George, and that in all lady Worsely's visits in Berkely-square, she had never spoken of him, farther than to say that he was well. Everard was, however, too anxious to renew the acquaintance, not to hazard the trial, under the favourable auspices of lady Worsely; but he was so much occupied with the thoughts of his reception, that he scarcely knew what her ladyship was saying during their ride home.

When they arrived, he perceived that she forgot ceremony, in her haste to get up stairs before him; he could not doubt that, with all her influence, she wished to prepare sir George for his appearance;

pearance; and he, as anxious himself, lingered to allow her time. He heard her speak, but it was in a whisper he could not distinguish; the next minute she re-appeared again at the door, and said—" Sir George, I have brought Mr. Everard from his solitary table to dine with us."

It was evident that sir George had not the slightest expectation of such a rencounter; surprise, stiffness, resentment, mingled visibly with his desire to conciliate himself to the wishes of his wife: the latter, after the flurry of the moment, predominated, and he accosted Everard with suavity, but just such as he would have offered to an entire stranger.

This lasted for about half an hour; but as he recovered his self-possession,

and

and was able to remark the diffident manner of Everard, the faltering emotion of his voice, and the conscious humility of his downcast eye, the kindlier feelings of his heart prevailed; and catching the pleading look of his wife, which was to him ever as a guiding star, he gave his hospitable manners full scope, and appeared, like lady Worsely, to have forgotten that unpleasant references belonged to their guest.

From that day Everard again became a visitor at sir George's, and by imperceptible degrees, once more acquired that interest in the esteem of his host, which he had at one time so utterly forfeited. Had his error led to happiness, the forgiveness had been granted with less amenity of extent; but attended with the punishing result which it was impossible

possible to conceal, sir George and his lady thought they treated him with but that mercy which, had they themselves been conscious and regretting of fault, they would have hoped to receive from Christian charity. Yet, although unrepenting their renewed intimacy, lady Worsely could not help sometimes reflecting, with considerable perplexity, that Everard, a visitor at their house, might be disagreeable to Laura, when she came again to make it her place of abode.

She mentioned her uneasiness to sir George; he allowed it might at first be unpleasant, but said, as a reconciliation had been brought about betwixt her and her niece, it was impossible but that she and her husband should again be received at their house; adding, that as

Laura,

Laura, from the circumstance of a numerous part of their acquaintance being in common, must inevitably be frequently thrown into the company of Everard on her return to England, it might be as well for both, that nothing should remain of what could outwardly recall any disturbance of the past to their recollection, or that of others, alleging a thorough conviction that the mind of Laura had by this time conquered all remains of a partiality that had been returned by ingratitude and slight.

Lady Worsely agreed that the former part of his observations might be correct in their opinion; the latter she could not contradict—a reference to the name even of Everard had never been made in one single letter of Laura's; she hoped only

only what sir George seemed inclined to maintain must be true; she knew the steady constancy of Laura's disposition, and the deep tenderness with which her affections had been devoted to Everard. But although lady Worsely doubted that the impression might be yet entirely erased from her memory, she had not a fear for her conduct; she had witnessed her behaviour, under the first anguish of resigning a beloved but perfidious lover, and beheld, with pitying admiration, the struggle of delicate and modest pride, to subdue the agony of her wounded heart, and conceal a strength of attachment which womanly reserve shrunk to discover.

It was for the inward peace of Laura's heart alone that lady Worsely was apprehensive; she was satisfied that all in her

her demeanour would be dignified and self-respectful, nor one look be allowed to escape that could point her to the observation as injured or disappointed.

CHAP-

CHAPTER IX.

THE recovery of Sophia's health proved that the hopes of Everard were fallacious, in trusting to any influence which lady Worsely might regain over her niece; she hastened to return to those scenes where life was wasted in unthinking folly; the advice of her aunt made no impression on her conduct; relieved from the tediousness of an invalid room, nor longer dependent on her husband or lady Worsely, to enliven hours whose solitude would have otherwise been nearly unbroken on by any of those she called friends, her heartless disposition displayed

displayed itself anew; and forgetful of the kindness and pardon of her aunt, she was led, by her headlong desire after gaiety, to regret a reconciliation that exposed her to the odious voice of reason or reproof. She durst not reply to her aunt, with the petulance and defying sarcasm which she too frequently used to her husband; and when lady Worsely did not condemn by words, she perceived disapprobation so visible in her looks, and angry impatience in those of sir George, that she had scarcely visited again at their house, when she hated to go near it, and sought every excuse to avoid being in their company.

Three months after her reconciliation with her uncle and aunt, saw her nearly as much estranged from their society as during the period of their open alienation.

tion. Obstinate, self-willed, and without any intellectual resource, it was misery to her to be at home, with only those of the family; she had no warm feeling nor attachment, that could, with amiable influence, sway her by its tenderness for another. Wearied and disgusted with the expostulations, and employment of time, of those who had an interest in her welfare, she fled from the very mention of advice, and sought so eagerly the amusements which the circle of fashion offers to its votaries, that, in the endless variety of her engagements, her life seemed to be a continued whirl of giddy and extravagant folly.

Another year elapsed, and still Everard's happiest hours were spent at the hospitable mansion of sir George—his

own

own home was desolate of comfort as ever. Sophia and he had no family; one little blossom, in the earlier part of their union, had been blighted in the bud, and no more appeared, to be an irresistible tie between him and his wife. He felt his life a cheerless blank; the future presented a prospect as void of enjoyment as the present; and when the past obtruded on his thoughts, he would have flown, had it been possible, from himself.

As the period approached of Laura's expected return to her guardians, lady Worsely once or twice endeavoured, through the medium of conversing with other company present, to allow Everard an opportunity of commencing a subject, without embarrassment, which she really wished now he should appear to

to enter on with the ease of a friend. Everard, however, attempted not to take advantage of the opening so well intentioned; when the conversation was introduced, his ideas seemed to become confused on any topic which had previously engaged him; nor could he ever, during the mention of Laura, raise his eyes so as to encounter those of sir George and lady Worsely.

It was about the close of the third spring since her residence in France, that Laura returned to her native land. They crossed from Calais, and sir George, aware of their movements, was already arrived at Dover, to welcome his beloved ward, and accompany her back to his house.

Neither party delayed there: the Commelines were anxious to revisit their

their long-deserted home, and Laura no less so to meet again lady Worsely, whose character was impressed upon her affection, in all the endearing remembrances of a daughter's love.

Laura was not altogether unprepared for the appearance of Everard at her guardian's; lady Worsely had thought it her duty to mention, that a reconciliation had at last taken place between them and the Everards, ascribing it justly to the severe and dangerous indisposition of her niece.

It was however some days before Sophia ventured to pay her visit to Laura, and even then she came alone; Everard dared not present himself, in company with his wife, in his first interview with the woman whom he had so dishonourably treated. From the instant

he knew of her arrival, his whole frame had become unnerved, and shrunk to encounter eyes in whose sight he felt humbled and debased. He shunned, yet desired to seek the mansion of sir George: he had been formerly a constant visitor there—his absence must be remarked, and he shuddered at the justice of the self-degrading motives which that worthy pair would assign as the cause of his disappearance. He could not voluntarily dare a first interview; and in his agitating irresolution, he was unwilling even to encounter sir George or lady Worsely; he seemed to feel himself anew more sunk, more miserable, more unworthy, as if only compassion could procure for him any regard from those who knew the perfidy and the dishonour of his past conduct.

A dinner-

A dinner-party brought them present to each other; and Everard beheld enter, the placid and respectable-looking sir George, with his lady and Laura on either arm. A sudden thrill rushed through every vein of Everard; he shrunk from accosting lady Worsely, and only spoke to sir George when he retreated amongst the gentlemen.

On the summons to dinner, Laura passed him, on her way from the drawing-room; her look was serious and downcast, as she advanced to where he stood; then, as if some sudden recollection had occurred, she modestly raised her eyes, and made him a mild inclination of recognition.

The shade of his position hid the burning and conscious glow of Everard; his eyes fell beneath hers; but he had hardly

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terruption of dinner, the little talkativeness which he had before shewn, sunk into mute abstractedness of manner. With his eyes almost constantly fixed on the table, and in busy trifling with some fruit, he appeared to attend with listless indifference to the various topics now started into discussion. It was but an involuntary disguise; none were so attentive as he, although to one subject only.

Laura, just returned from the Continent, was asked many questions of France—its scenes—its inhabitants—its manners. Her sweet accents in reply rivetted the very soul of Everard. Her gentle courtesy—her intelligent answers—her polished and appropriate language, desirous to please, amid the

evident timidity which she felt at thus being drawn into notice, excited the approving admiration of all who were attracted by the subject.

Sir George looked on in smiling satisfaction, as his young favourite thus modestly displayed the information of her mind; and Everard, as he listened to her discourse, sensible and talented, yet with all the grace of feminine and retiring softness, felt his heart weigh heavier in his breast, while, as he beheld the paternal exultation of sir George, he could not resist, in distracting thought, to exclaim—"*Once* she might have been mine—I too might have viewed her with delighted pride!"

The voice of Sophia recalled him from his dream—it was a seasonable but a painfully comparing interruption. She

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and a young girl, for Sophia ever sought the youngest in company, were indulging themselves in all the unrestrained mirth of childish folly. They had a boy-guardsman betwixt them, and were stabbing oranges, and holding them up to those around them, as semblances of his heroic feats of valour. Of course, the gentlemen next them laughed, and extolled the wit of the two fair assailants; the ladies around them smiled at, or joined in, the sport, as suited their fancies; and the young guardsman, half angry, half pleased, sometimes frowned, and sometimes giggled as loudly as his unmerciful neighbours.

Everard remembered his lot, and was glad when the lady of the house motioned an adjournment to the drawing-room. The ladies were scarcely withdrawn,

when a young man, who had sat beside Laura, proposed a bumper to her health. It was received and drank with universal approbation; but the young guardsman offered no such mark of admiration to either of his fair neighbours.

Everard could not summon resolution to approach Laura that evening; but the following day, nerving himself for the occasion, he proceeded to sir George's, and, on inquiry, found that both the ladies were at home. A trepidation, he in vain endeavoured to banish, stole across his whole frame, as he ascended the stairs; and when the door was thrown open and his name announced, it was with difficulty he retained sufficient courage to enter. His perturbation was uselessly self-inflicted; all was calm and affable to receive him.

Lady

Lady Worsely's address possessed its wonted bland courtesy; and Laura's manner, although under an involuntary shade of reserve, displayed no chilling remembrance of injury: she returned his diffident salutation, as to a stranger of the day; and seating herself by lady Worsely, exerted herself to take a part in the conversation, which her friend industriously contrived, to take from the awkwardness that, in spite of all anxiety to the contrary, did reign in this interview.

There was an air of restraint hung over Laura, that she wished, yet could not command herself so as altogether to repel; her cheek looked also cold and pale, and her smile was faint and inanimate. Everard was still more evidently under the influence of embarrassment;

his eyelids fell in conscious conviction of the perfidy and shame of the past; nor could his lips attempt to speak, without quivering. And there they sat, opposite to each other, cold, distant, and reserved; two who had once so warmly and so fondly met, severed now in love, acquaintance, and interest.

Luckily some visitors were shortly after announced, welcome to relieve the perplexity of Everard and Laura, and to release lady Worsely from a continuance of conversation which fell entirely on herself to supply.

Assisted by the presence of those who were ignorant of the mutual recollections which could not fail at first to embarrass Everard and her, Laura made such an effort to recover possession of her demeanour, that soon after the arrival of these

these new visitors, she had, to outward appearance, conquered all that was painful in her memory, and regained her usual charming composure of manner.

Everard lingered to depart; although disturbed with ceaseless and peace-destroying reflections, there was an influence in the presence of Laura, that came over him with a soothing sensation of melancholy. He gazed, in hidden earnestness, upon the face which had first captivated his young heart; and as he contemplated the heavenly calm of her pure brow, the deep sensibility of her modest eye, the soft transparent tint of her polished cheek, and all the lovely delicacy of feature and mind that shone in her gentle countenance, astonishment superseded, for the moment, all other feeling, that the time could have ever

been when his fancy led him to prefer the splendour of complexion alone, to the lovely expression of soul, and heart, and intellect, and be treacherous to Laura, to his vows, his honour, and, alas! his judgment.

Those who had known and loved Laura, and fancied, in their partiality, that it was impossible she could be more charming than she was, were surprised to find, on her return, that they were obliged to allow even she could improve. More matured in mind and idea, she was no longer the simple bashful girl; she was formed now into the elegant and reflective woman, equally candid and artless as in former days, but more dignified in that simplicity; and her ingenuousness, though still as pure,

pure, less under the impulses of her inexperienced heart.

Accomplished in all the outward adornments of polished life, her taste equally refined and cultivated, gentle without weakness, and pious and well-principled without stiffness or severity, Laura was as amiable a young woman as this frail earth could produce; admired by all, and cherished as invaluable by her intimate friends.

Her abode on the Continent had given a graceful ease to her manner, that, without detracting from its English chastity, yet considerably enhanced the charms of her person; and mingling more in company, and with more confidence in herself than she had done during the time of her engagement with Everard, when she retired from all notice,

tice, and from her youth was scarcely known to have appeared in the fashionable world, she attracted a universal attention, and received overtures of marriage from several men of fortune and unexceptionable character.

This occurred during the remainder of her stay in town that season. Sir George and lady Worsely, although doting on her society, were too generous in their fondness to wish to gratify their own satisfaction, at the expence of a suitable establishment for their ward; and recommended those addresses to her acceptance which most met with their own approbation.

The heart of Laura was full of sensibility; it did not contain one selfish feeling: in her dreams of happiness, marriage with a beloved object was ever the basis

of

of her imagination; and to spend her life with one whose felicity she was to make, whose returning affection cherished her in protecting faith, whom she could respect as a friend, and devote herself to as a husband, constituted the most supreme idea that she could form of sublunary bliss. Yet still, with all these warm and delightful notions of matrimony, Laura could not bring her mind to seek for that tenderly-pictured lot, with any of those lovers who approached her.

Aware of the truth of the advice which recommended to her the advantage and comfort which an eligible marriage adds to the situation of a woman, however independent may be her fortune before, Laura considered with attention all the friendly and disinterested

counsels

counsels of her guardians on that subject, and often pondered upon the possibility of bringing her mind to trust for its happiness, in a union with one of those who solicited her hand, and whose claims were supported by fortune, character, and agreeableness. But when it came to the absolute decision of her intention, Laura could not bring herself to accede to the suit; her heart revolted from the proposed connection, and all her assent to the wishes of her guardians was a deliberation, which constantly ended in an utter rejection.

CHAPTER IX.

THE summer of that year Laura spent at Cheltenham, whither sir George carried his lady on account of her health. Sophia had thought of a visit to that place also, but the instant she heard her aunt was to be there, she abandoned the plan entirely, too wearied of that good relation in London to seek to meet her elsewhere. She therefore hastened to Brighton, partook of its pleasures to their most extravagant height; and had the satisfaction, of all others most dear to her, to be considered the gayest, the loveliest,

loveliest, and the most fashionable woman in its courtly throng.

The following winter again saw the two families in London—lady Worsely in better health, and her niece prepared to run the same round of dissipation as formerly. All at sir George's were shocked to observe the alteration which the few last months had made in the appearance of Everard: he was become excessively thin; and the clear, ruddy brown, which had once mantled on his cheek, was lost in the pale and faded hue of ill health, or some other wasting cause. Sophia laughed when the change was remarked to her—declared she did not perceive it—only his usual dismal look, acquired by constantly poring over books, and denying himself all enlivening amusement. She did not give her aunt

aunt time to express in words the angry astonishment that her eyes discovered, at this unfeeling comment upon her husband, but flew off to gayer and more beloved scenes, careless, apparently, if Everard were to expire beneath the care of others.

He perceived the heartlessness of his wife; but he had long since ceased to think of her in any light that could hold out the hopes of returning comfort to himself; he felt his desolate lot, and knew, in sorrow or in dying, he need not turn to home to seek for sympathy or alleviation, in any distress that he might suffer. To behold the anxiety of sir George and lady Worsely, and to receive their every attention which friendship could bestow, was gratifying yet painful to Everard, when he reflect-

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ed on the waste which he had himself made of all the fair hopes which his life had once promised.

Laura, now fully aware of the fatal result of his infidelity to her, could not conceal her pity and solicitude for his fate. Everard, inconstant and happy, she could have treated with the cold indifference he deserved; but to see him so altered from the gay and joyous being she remembered him, deprived of happiness, and drooping under disease, without a home where he could seek for consolation, was more than her soft heart could steel itself against. He beheld the compassion that struggled in her eyes—the solicitude that insensibly breathed through her words and manner, as she strove in vain to hide an interest in his health, which, owing to past circumstances

cumstances alone, she shrunk to discover in his behalf.

Everard, for a time, permitted himself to *feel* all this: they talked to him of physicians; he knew their aid would be useless in his case; it was a disease of mind, not of body, that threatened him with premature decay. He had indulged himself, during the last summer, in retrospections that admitted only anguish; his heart, despised by her for whom it had betrayed itself, was thrown back lonely on his bosom; and driven, by the hand that should have screened it most from such memories, to revert to the sacrifice it had made of love and honour. His judgment, his reason, his reflection, all told him, too wofully soon, that he had mistaken passion for love; and for the gratification of a fleeting enjoyment,

enjoyment, resigned an attachment founded on reason, and a permanency of faithful feelings, that would have been constant in their esteem, admiration, and calm and steady delight.

Assured by the remembrance that never left him of Laura, that his greatest error had been when he allowed his frenzy to imagine his love for her effaced, he was no sooner again in her presence, than he felt that his heart, however momentarily dazzled by a passing flame, had never ceased to be wholly her own. He saw her beautiful; but it was not her loveliness that convinced him of the steadiness of an attachment which had wandered, but never been removed. It was a sensation of esteem, tenderness, and admiration, blended so inseparably together, that each different feeling that composed

composed it, seemed alternately to predominate, as the most powerful impulse of the whole.

He was not aware of the extent of this indulgence of idea, until he separated from her the preceding summer, when, deprived of the soothing society of the Worselys, and too depressed in spirit to be able to endure the company of the gay and indifferent, memory became his sole occupation; and his heart buried itself in thought, whose distracting tendency served to diminish the vigour of his body, as it reduced the strength of his mind.

Feeling the gradually weakening state of his constitution, and admitting no hope to make the decay unwished, Everard, with a morbid sensibility, once more sought the presence of Laura, imagining

imagining that his death was not far distant, and that in the last remains of his existence, a pardoning mercy would be extended to him, for desiring his dying eyes to dwell on her, while his feeble frame could support him to her sight.

With such thoughts he renewed his visits at the house of sir George Worsely the following winter, and permitted this mournful delusion to beguile him, for a short period, with its deceptive colouring.

Wretched as he was, he could not cherish the illusion long: reason awoke to condemn his erring weakness; and his principles, naturally correct and upright, started at last from their slumber, and with a voice of thunder, accused his criminality.

He was the husband of Sophia—did

it

it fit him the more to die, that he forgot that character, and wasted his last moments in unbounded affection for another?

Everard could not be long under error—he fled from Laura; the mansion of sir George, where all resided that ever offered consolation to him, was no longer visited; he denied all the solicitations of sir George and lady Worsely to return, he shut himself up in invalid seclusion, and ill and lonely, endeavoured to subdue the shock of this new separation.

Those he had deserted at sir George's were most anxious and uneasy for his sake; they scarcely ever heard of him, but when they absolutely set out on the search. Sir George frequently called on him—lady Worsely sometimes went

herself to inquire about his health; but visibly avoided by her niece, and ever seeing something to distress her at Berkely-square, it was seldom she repaired thither, depending mostly on her husband for intelligence of Everard.

Laura never accompanied her, even on those few visits. On her first return, Sophia had wished to lead her into all the gaieties of her circle; but Laura steadfastly resisting her seductions, and displaying in her behaviour all the gentle prudence which marked the conduct of lady Worsely, became, at last, as obnoxious to the thoughtless Sophia, as was her aunt; and sometimes, in her ungenerous levity, she had thrown out such pointed and unfeeling allusions to her triumph of the past, that Laura, mild and peaceful as she was, could not

refrain

refrain from shewing her displeasure, by withdrawing entirely from Sophia's acquaintance, except such casual intercourse as common society produced.

While they were thus in a manner again estranged from the Everards, for Sophia scarcely ever appeared at her aunt's, they were sometimes days without gaining accounts of the invalid, that never ceased to interest them all.

About two months after the cessation of Everard's visits, lady Worsely and Laura were seated together one morning at work; her ladyship was talking of not having heard from Berkely-square for nearly the last week, and was proposing to send a message, when a servant entered, and presented to her a note from Mr. Everard's. She hastily tore it open; the hand-writing was un-

known, and seemed to have been written so hastily, that it was scarcely legible. She read it aloud.

"MADAM,

"You and Miss Dillon are much wanted here. With haste, or it will be too late.

"R. FAIRFAX."

It was the signature of a celebrated physician. A panic struck to the heart of lady Worsely, and in breathless anticipation she exclaimed—"Everard is gone!"

"Dear madam, do you think so?" said Laura, faintly, and the next instant she dropped senseless from her chair.

Lady

Lady Worsely shrieked, as she ran to support her. The cry excited the attention of sir George, in the adjoining library; he hastened to inquire the cause, and with dismay beheld the inanimate condition of Laura. He rung for assistance; and when she was partially recovered, and he had seen the note which occasioned the alarm, he hurried to demand of the bearer, who still remained in the hall, what sad event had produced such a request.

On his re-entering the drawing-room, a shocked gravity was visible in his countenance: Laura's head sunk on the supporting bosom of lady Worsely, who had scarcely power to utter—"What is it?"

"Poor Sophia!" replied sir George, much moved; "she was seized last

night with a violent attack of inflammation, and is still so ill, that doctor Fairfax apprehends the worst. I have ordered the carriage immediately."

They soon departed for Berkely-square, and arrived there in almost unbroken silence, each too much confounded at this sudden illness of Sophia, to be able to collect their thoughts for speech.

The housekeeper met them as they alighted, and confirmed all their fears of the danger of her mistress; she said Mrs. Everard had been complaining of colds for the two last months; but unwilling to confine herself to the house, she had treated them lightly, and refused all care, which might have removed them. She had been taken ill at a party the preceding night, and had come

come home about twelve o'clock, in such violent agony, that Mr. Everard had instantly sent for a physician. He had never left her since, and was so agitated, that when she cried to see lady Worsely and Miss Dillon, he was obliged to request doctor Fairfax to write the note.

The housekeeper went up stairs to inform her mistress of their arrival, and almost instantly returned, to desire their attendance.

Sir George remained below, while lady Worsely and Laura, pale and trembling, ascended to the sick chamber. The convulsive moanings of Sophia struck appallingly on their ears, as they approached where she lay. Everard sat, a bloodless image, by her side, his eyes rivetted on the beauteous dying

creature extended before him. She looked up piteously to them as they advanced to her, but exhausted with agony, she neither spoke nor moved.

Those that stood by were dead silent; an air of horror seemed to reign throughout the chamber, suffocating each breath with its dreadful weight. This dismal silence was terribly broken by the renewed spasms of Sophia; she shrieked in torture, and writhed in the arms of her husband, as he supported her, and vainly endeavoured to relieve her pain.

In an interval of ease, she feebly said —"Forgive me, aunt!—Laura, forgive me!" but her voice died away in weakness, and scarcely had power to articulate the words. They understood the low accents, and tears, which had before refused to flow, gushed over the cheeks

of

of both, as they blessed the poor supplicant.

Doctor Fairfax called shortly after, and lady Worsely, as she spoke to him apart, implored him, in anguish, to give her some hopes of her niece's recovery.

He seemed to feel the distress of her application, and commiseratingly replied —"I might beguile you with a vague answer to your question; and perhaps were the danger of Mrs. Everard less apparent, I would not give my opinion so plainly; but as the case at present stands, I consider it due to your feelings to warn you of her approaching fate, lest that, and the unexpectedness of the shock, should be more than the fortitude of her friends could support."

Lady Worsely listened to this death-warrant of her niece, as if some horrible

delusion had come over her senses, nor attempted to seek for words to express a sensation which she felt was unutterable.

She and Laura watched with Everard through the whole day, the painful and dying couch of Sophia. They could only judge that she thought she was in danger, by the frequent appeals which she made to them all for forgiveness. It was useless to talk to her of the eternity she was about to enter; her agony was so continued and acute, that it was but the respite of a moment when any consideration was left her, but the torment she was suffering. They prayed for her; and when she could distinguish their holy aspirations, her eyes would be seen to fill with tears.

It was evident that the sad condition of his wife alone supported Everard from

from sinking on the bed, in nearly as dying a state as herself; she was not half so pale, for agony flushed her cheek, while his was ashy as death; his voice was almost powerless of sound, and his breath so broken in respiration, that he appeared every minute as if he would faint from her side.

As night approached, it was perceptible to all that Sophia's life was drawing to its close. The spasms attacked her less frequently, but the languor of her frame at times resembled insensibility, and an icy chillness was creeping fast over her.

From one of those lethargic fits she suddenly awoke to a greater sense of recollection than she had displayed through the day; her voice even was stronger; and clasping the hand of lady Worsely,

which was holding hers, she articulated another feeble petition for forgiveness.

Lady Worsely scarcely could reply, as she fondly kissed the damp forehead of her niece.

The tender anguish of her husband, as Sophia addressed her imploring and contrite voice to him, was incapable of speech: he clasped her to his breast in mute agony, but its bursting palpitations spoke for the sincerity of the pardon she solicited. She lay for a moment overcome; then directing her eyes to the pale and motionless Laura, faltered a request to be forgiven by her, and extended her hand.

Laura bent forward to clasp it, and uttered, in overpowered accents—"Think not of me—I have nothing to forgive."

A deep

A deep emotion quivered on the lips of Sophia; she lifted the hand of her husband, and struggling to retain her voice, lowly murmured—" Pardon him, Laura, as you pardon me!" She attempted to join their hands, but her grasp was too feeble, and they sunk separate from her hold.

She looked sadly on them; then shrieked, and convulsively turned to the breast of her husband; a sudden spasm racked through her frame; Everard threw his trembling arms around her; she shivered for a minute in his embrace, then, with an effort, clasped his neck, and faintly but wildly articulated—" Oh Everard, forgive me!"

He stooped to ease the strain of her position. As he did so, the arms dropped from his neck—the head fell back, and

and the beauteous face, now motionless and still, was fixed immoveably in death.

CHAP-

CHAPTER X.

THE chief mourner of the funeral train that laid the fair, inconsiderate Sophia in her early tomb, was sir George Worsely. Everard was languishing under a fever of low and nervous depression; his frame already weakened, and his spirits shattered, and unfit for exertion, totally sunk under the shock of Sophia's death. The event was so unexpected, so awfully sudden in its completion, that an astounding sensation paralyzed, for a time, the feelings of all around. On Everard, previously exhausted in mind and body, it fell with grievous

grievous effect, and threw him on his bed, ill and enervated to such a degree, that it was days before he regained strength to raise his head from the pillow.

Lady Worsely sincerely bewailed the death of her niece, cut off at so short a warning and so little prepared for the great account her poor erring soul had to render. She recalled the fair prospects of Sophia's life—the absolute banishment of all that could distress from her lot—the blessings that were lavished upon her, and the waste, the ruin to which she had perverted those precious gifts.

The more she mourned, the more she regretted the thoughtless career of her niece. Laura, ever near to sympathize, though deploring, and deeply struck with

with the awe of Sophia's sudden death, would have fain consoled her ladyship; and one day, when she was retracing the happy fate which Sophia might have enjoyed, and that retrospection making her lamentations more bitter and regretting than usual, Laura gently said—"Dear madam, remember it is only folly that you have to mourn—there was no vice."

"True," replied lady Worsely; "but, alas! Laura, there was no virtue. I know not which is the less guilty—the life of actual crime, that has some compunctious feelings, and awakening hours of remorse, or the life spent in a round of frivolity, obstinate in folly, despising the reflection of rationality, and callous to every thought of the comfort of another."

Again

Again did lady Worsely become a daily visitor at Berkely-square, attending to the lingering illness of Everard, and exerting herself to revive his drooping spirits. She perceived, with pleased satisfaction, the cheering influence which her presence had upon him; his eyes began to brighten at her approach, and attracted by the various topics which, with constant care, she endeavoured to choose to enliven him, his spirits insensibly assumed a better tone; and as his malady decreased, his frame appeared to to be fast recovering its wonted strength and vigour. Sir George was also unfailing in his attentions: deeply read and well informed on all useful subjects, he could not be other than an acceptable companion to a man of such similar tastes to himself as Everard.

Under

Under this delightful care, the invalid in a few weeks was able to quit his chamber, and enjoy the freer and wider air of the drawing-room. A few others of his friends began now to drop in, to chat with him; but amongst all his visitors, none were so welcome as sir George and lady Worsely; he was grateful, and attached to them for the unvaried kindness and attention which he had so long experienced from their invaluable friendship; but a deeper feeling than that was also added to the interest they inspired.

He saw not Laura; but they were a link between him and her, that seemed to unite them still. He dared not trust himself to deliberate thought of the future—the knell of death was yet too recent in his ear; but ever as the image

of

of Laura arose to his mind, a bland and soothing sensation flowed deliciously through his feelings, and a light elasticity caused his spirits to bound from the depression which had so long and so lately subdued them.

The first day he was convalescent enough to take the air, he only tried a short drive in his carriage; but he bore it so well, that sir George Worsely, who was his companion, declared he should pay a visit to-morrow at his house, and repay one, at least, of the many he owed to his wife.

Everard would indeed have been a feeble invalid, had he objected to such a proposal; it seemed, on the contrary, to invigorate his frame; and he rose so refreshed the following morning, that sir George, when he called on him, gladly

gladly observed the benefit which he seemed to have derived from his yesterday's excursion.

As Everard alighted at that house so dear, yet sad to his memory, and ascended those stairs which he had last trod in wretchedness beyond description, his strength was unable to support the recollection, and he leaned heavy upon the assisting arm of his companion.

Sir George perhaps might guess the cause of his sudden tremour: he made no questions upon it, but stopped sympathizingly, until the invalid had recovered his fluttering breath, and was able to proceed.

Lady Worsely, expecting the visit, appeared on the landing-place, to welcome him once more to their house. As he entered the drawing-room, Laura, who

who had remained there, came forward to receive him; a slight trepidation was perceptible in her voice, and a brilliant glow of joy flushed her cheek, as, with cautious accents, she congratulated him on his recovery.

Everard might have appeared handsomer, but never more interesting than he did that day; his deep mourning and weepers seemed sadly to suit the emaciated languor of his frame; and his youthful, but faded countenance, though wasted from its former beauty and animation, possessed, in its pensive melancholy, a more attractive expression still, to those whose feelings were attuned to the warmer sympathies of the heart. Never had Laura felt her woman's reserve so cruel as at this moment, when it restrained her choking tears from gushing forth

forth in a torrent of joy and sorrow, to see Everard restored from the brink of the grave, yet to behold him such a drooping wreck of health and form.

A hectic of a moment flushed his cheek, as he clasped the unconsciously offered hand of Laura; and his voice was so tremulous in reply to her congratulation, that with an anxiety all her caution failed to conceal, she said—"I fear you have attempted too much, Mr. Everard, in thus early visiting. You have exhausted yourself."

Everard, with a look of humble gratitude, that added to the varying colour of Laura, denied that he had exerted himself beyond his strength to bear; and in deep and heartfelt tones, expressed anew his thanks to lady Worsely for her unbounded attention to him, and also

also to Laura, for the interest she had deigned to manifest in his behalf. He used the word *deign* with a marked humility of tone, as if no other expression could be applied to any concern which she might extend to him.

Sir George, under whose charge he had come, would not allow him to make a long visit, lest the effort of exerting himself in the presence of the ladies might afterwards prove to have been too much for his still invalid state.

Everard reluctantly departed; and certainly the interview, from some cause or other, had exhausted him greatly, for the following day he was not able to quit the house.

This, happily, however, was but a transient relapse; each after-succeeding day found him more removed from debility,

bility, and though still bearing visible marks of his recent indisposition, recovering fast his wonted strength and fulness of form.

Sir George no longer prescribed his minutes at his house; he was again its constant visitor, and as he became able to return to society, its almost as frequent guest; but though he had determined to try to recover his madly-forfeited place in Laura's heart, he breathed not a syllable at present beyond the warmth of a friend.

He owed too much to lady Worsely, to insult her by his suit to another, ere her niece was scarcely three months in her grave; nor could he hope other than to offend Laura, by a precipitance repellent to the habits of society, and which

would shock her gentle feelings, and nice and just sense of decorum.

Lady Worsely having found such benefit from her visit to Cheltenham last year, it was arranged that they should go thither again this next summer; and Everard, who yet required to be considerably recruited in constitution, it was also settled should accompany them.

CHAPTER XI.

As the time approached for their excursion, Laura expressed her intention of paying a visit to a lady, who had long been soliciting her company.

Lady Worsely heard her with regretting surprise; but the deep glow and confused manner of Laura, as she begged to be permitted to go, brought a surmise to her ladyship's mind that it was to avoid the presence of Everard that she wished to shun the Cheltenham jaunt. Suspecting so, she was vexed at having so unthinkingly included Everard in their party; nor denied that Laura,

considering what had once been their situation to each other, had cause to feel reluctant and embarrassed at being placed in a manner under the same roof with him; for Everard, although to have different lodging, was intended to be one of the family through the day at Cheltenham.

The blank and disappointed look of Everard, when he understood that Laura was to visit a distant stranger, did not escape the observation of lady Worsely. She sighed as she recollected the unfortunate Sophia; but esteeming Everard, and convinced that he had erred from passion, not principle, and in the intervening years, learned steadiness and experience at a melancholy price, she shrunk not at his intention of courting another choice, but rather desired that

the long-estranged engagement betwixt Laura and him should eventually be completed; well aware that however silent and reserved Laura might be on the subject, the hold of Everard on her heart, though perhaps weakened, had never been displaced.

Indulging those wishes and opinions, lady Worsely did not offer much objection to the request of Laura to visit her friend, Mrs. Beaufort; she thought it might be of service to both, as in the separation, each would have time to reflect on the strength and stability of those sentiments which might again lead them to renew their severed vows.

Everard tolerably mastered his feelings, until the day of Laura's departure. As he handed her into the carriage, his looks, his manner, all be-

trayed the agitation he experienced; he lingered to the last to retain her hand, that gently struggled to be free, and as at last he was forced to relinquish it, she fancied she heard him say—"Will you forget me?" but the tones were so low, broken, and despairing, that they were scarcely articulate, nor demanded to be noticed.

The summer passed over Everard's head, with renovating effect to his health; and the hope, though one of trembling fear, that his pardon might yet be implored from Laura, helped to buoy him into as much happiness as he could feel in absence from her.

Warmly as he had loved her in the first captivation of his heart, he felt that the attachment he then possessed for her was weak, in comparison to that which

which now enshrined her in his bosom. It was a sacred love, that hallowed the friend and the mistress in one pure and unquenchable flame, undying in its power—for reason, judgment, intellect, convinced by the experience of error, sanctified with their approbation an affection which added lustre to their discernment.

He had not, as yet, avowed these sentiments to lady Worsely; the remembrance, that she was the aunt of Sophia, and that she knew his former inconstancy to Laura, tied his tongue in irresolute silence: a report, which reached them in rather strong colouring, first induced him to make the confession he had for some time back panted, yet feared to commit to her ladyship.

Some Cheltenham visitors, from that

part of the country where Laura was at present a resident, mentioned having heard her marriage talked of, to a gentleman of fortune in that neighbourhood. Lady Worsely laughed at the report, as ungrounded, convinced, had there been any truth in it, sir George and herself had been the first to be acquainted with it. It made Everard miserable; he could not convince himself, as lady Worsely did, of its improbability; and the report caused him a double uneasiness of apprehension, as the gentleman alluded to was he whom Everard recollected to have toasted at a party the health of Laura, with such enthusiasm of admiration.

In the wild anxiety which this intelligence occasioned him, he could no longer refrain from pouring out to lady Worsely

Worsely the state of his mind, with regard to Laura, and beseeching her to give him some counsel or hope, that might relieve or guide him through his perplexity of doubt.

Her ladyship listened with no astonishment; it was a subject she had quite prepared herself to hear, and was more just than to impute blame to him for seeking to recover a happiness which he had slighted and long lost, for her unfortunate niece.

Much passed on the subject between them; and the result was, lady Worsely's advising him to endeavour to discover how Laura felt inclined to forgive the past from herself. Eight months had elapsed since Sophia's death, and without any breach of decorum, he might now tender his suit to another.

Everard anxiously wished to elicit from her some opinion of what might be his chance of pardon from Laura; but her ladyship, true to the dignity of her sex, refused to hazard one remark that could hurt the delicacy of Laura's feelings, or the modest and amiable reserve which she had ever used on the early disappointment of her heart.

Laura confessed to herself, that it was with reluctance she declined the Cheltenham excursion; it was the innate sense of prudence and decorum, which never for an instant forsook her conduct, that prompted the reasons which led to her departure. She had recognised the former looks of Everard—the expression of his manner had impressed itself too deeply on her mind, to allow its motives to be mistaken now. She could not doubt

doubt that his heart was returning to its former tenderness for her; and conscious of that feeling on his part, it occasioned her an embarrassment, which convinced her she could not remain to be in a manner domesticated with him, without evident impropriety, and the decided disapprobation of her own ideas of prudence.

Although sensible that she had done right in departing, Laura's summer did not pass off very lightly at Mrs. Beaufort's; she was disturbed, or perhaps better said, engrossed with the recollection of Everard, and perplexed with uncertain thoughts of the demands of pride, or the pleadings of love.

Months ran on in this doubt and reflective thought, when one day, as she was entertaining some visitors, in the

slight indisposition of Mrs. Beaufort, the door was thrown open, and a stranger announced.

Everard entered, not as she had last seen him—pale and debilitated, but the Everard of former days—full of life, vigour, and health. The ingenuous blood of Laura kindled on face and brow at this most unexpected interview, and the deeper grew the blush as she endeavoured to divest herself of its power. It reflected itself vividly in the countenance of Everard; and so marked was the confusion that reigned in the address of both, that the most simple of the guests present, observed, when departed—"I am sure Miss Dillon met her lover to-day."

It was, however, some little time before they made their courtesies of adieu.

Few

Few as these minutes were, they tortured Everard with their length, while Laura, astonished at his appearance in a part of the country so distant from his acquaintance and interests, trembled at its purport, and dreaded to see her guests even move on their chairs. But they did go, and as the door closed upon them, Everard started up, and approached Laura. She grew all tremulous in the instant, and anxious to speak, yet hardly knowing what she said, she stammered out an inquiry about sir George and lady Worsely.

She had asked the question not five minutes before, and recollected it as the last words passed her lips. Everard was too perturbed to notice it; he replied vaguely, and drawing forth a letter,

ter, added—"It is from lady Worsely —will you read the contents now?"

Laura, glad of a relief, hastened to open the letter, and read, though not aloud—

"MY DEAR LAURA,

"I wrote to you so lately, that you must not expect even a page filled from me at present. We have heard strong reports of your marriage; Everard has volunteered to go all your way to satisfy my curiosity.

"My dearest Laura, may God bless and direct you in whatever you decide on for your happiness.

"E. WORSELY."

There was a preparation in the letter that

that nearly destroyed all the recollection of Laura; her hands fell with it trembling on her knee, and dying with thrilling fear, she attempted to take the letter as a jest. Her voice betrayed her, and faltered the more as she distinctly heard the throbbings that shook the breast of Everard, in this, to him, all-powerful moment of timidity, daring, and love. Her eyelids drooped, almost closing. Everard spoke, low and inarticulate, in the humility of his past transgression; his words were broken with emotion, and seemed to pour, with the blood of his heart, in the confession of his unworthiness to address her again, his deep conviction of his former ingratitude, and yet the presumption which led him once more to make her the idol and hope of his heart.

Ever

Ever would the lovely blush of Laura come, and as often recede, as the faltering and imploring voice of Everard dwelled upon her ear. It was in vain she called upon pride to support her against this once-unfaithful lover; it lingered not in her bosom beyond the first pleading accents that acknowledged his transgression and repentance. She knew he had suffered. Could she restore him to his forfeited peace? All the sweet tenderness of gentle woman's love gushed through each beating vein; yet still she could not utter that forgiveness, and sunk her head still lower, incapable of speech.

Everard, his eyes rivetted on her face, saw with trembling hope the deep, yet unresentful emotion that her countenance displayed: again he entreated for

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an answer, conjured her to have mercy upon an erring but repentant heart, and in the anguish of supplication, besought at least her compassion, in memory that he was her first lover.

"My first and only," softly replied Laura. She raised one glance of her modest eyes to his, blushed deeper as they met, and then gave him her hand once more. He clasped it in a transport of feeling that defied all utterance. For a moment he hid his face on the recovered treasure, and bathed it with tears he could not repress, and scarcely felt ashamed to shed.

Again were Laura and Everard plighted lovers—she ever faithful to her first vows, and he more fixed in truth than ever, from the sad experience he had known of the just consequences of

inconstancy

inconstancy. Five months afterwards saw the engagement of their hearts fulfilled and ratified, in the sight of God and man.

In no stolen obscure way did Everard now repair to the altar; accompanied by approving and congratulating friends, he met, in the proud triumph of love and reason, the woman of his first best choice, and through all his wanderings, the never-ceasing object of his esteem; and Laura too, though blushing and trembling in maiden modesty, joyfully vowed herself for ever to the tenderness and protection of Everard.

Sir George Worsely gave her away—a gift to make man's life as near to heaven as this frail earth can be; and as he placed her hand in Everard's, and imprinted the farewell kiss of his guardian-

ship

ship upon her glowing cheek, a tear fell upon it, warm and approving as if shed from a father's eye. It was a transient grief, that passed away to greater happiness still; affection, gratitude, and attention, as to real parents, were ever paid by Laura and Everard to sir George and lady Worsely; and that good couple beheld, with parental joy, the pure felicity which subsisted in the family of their young friends.

Home was now to Everard his haven of bliss—no longer a place of comfortless desolation, lonely to his voice, and still lonelier to his heart, it was the dear abode where all his thoughts and hopes of joy were reposed. Laura was there, with all the constant tenderness of a wife—lovely in her person, and charming in all the enchantments of an accomplished

complished and intelligent mind. He could depend on her gentle advice, when the perplexities of the world annoyed him; and if they harassed his spirits, her sweet and fond voice was ever by to sooth and to cheer him. And Everard made home as happy to Laura; he had erred as her lover, but as her husband his truth and affection were equal to her own: the sure friend, lover, and protector, he deserved the domestic felicity that exalted him as its centre. Happily enabled to recover his once-lost happiness, and to regain that conviction of inward rectitude which his youthful rashness had so nearly forfeited for ever, his more mature years were marked by a reflection and consistency of conduct, which, added to his upright principles, and excellent endowments of head and heart,



heart, procured for him the esteem and respect of all who composed the circle of his acquaintance.

Everard was sensible of the estimation in which he was held; and when gratified by the open regard of good men, he turned in gratitude to Laura, who had restored him to his own respect, and, in consequence, to that of others. He was happy in the world; but it was at home, in the presence of his wife, and surrounded by his children, that Everard experienced the truest enjoyment, and sighed with rapture at the conviction, that man expects felicity in vain, who seeks to find it beyond the hallowed pale of domestic love.

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